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ABSTRACT

The legislative history and provisions, implementation, and intended use of 12 state-mandated programs are described. Florida's program was mandated in 1971. The other states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia) initiated programs after 1975; most are in their initial stages with full scale operation expected in 1982 or 1983. The programs share these features: (1) performance objectives are established: (2) state developed or state contracted tests are administered to three or four elementary and secondary grade levels: (3) specific consequences are mandated for students who fail. Six states, for example, require high school students to pass minimum competency tests before graduating. Although these programs attract citizens and policy makers they raise many problems: funds are needed for remedial programs: states devote more effort to assessing than to satisfying needs of disadvantaged students: management and reporting systems are complex: mandates do not always apply to private schools or handicapped students: grade retention and diploma denial have social, educational, and financial costs: and school districts may lose autonomy. In the final analysis, teaching, not testing, can best assure the attainment of competencies. (CP)

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The Status of Minimum Competency Programs in Twelve Southern States

April, 1980

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Preface

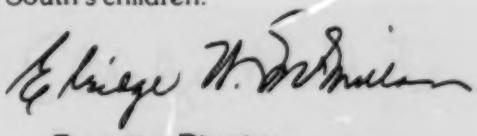
In 1979, the Southern Education Foundation requested that the Southeastern Public Education Program undertake a twelve-state assessment of minimum competency programs in our region. This report is a result of that request.

From its beginning, the mission of the Southern Education Foundation has been to enhance the quality of education available to Blacks in southern states.

Public policy issues in education, such as minimum competency testing programs, are of vital interest to the Foundation. New programs intended to enhance the quality of education in our region must be looked at closely to determine if they are achieving their stated purpose. The Foundation with its special mandate to improve Black education intends to look carefully at the implications of these programs for Black students and teachers in this region.

We feel a special responsibility to examine any program which promises change but appears in many instances to deliver only punishment to the victim.

We believe that this report is an important document for legislators, educators, parents, and citizens who are concerned with the policy implications of minimum competency programs in the South. We hope that it will assist those persons responsible for planning or implementing programs to decide if they are truly meeting the needs of the South's children.



Executive Director,
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Introduction

During the past two decades, state legislatures and boards of education in the South have begun to remedy the neglect of public education that crippled the region's human and economic development during the first half of the twentieth century. More money has been appropriated for public education, and teachers' salaries have increased dramatically. Curriculum offerings have been strengthened and expanded, and the needs of formerly unserved children have been addressed. Federal aid-to-education funds have not only been accepted, but sought. The duties, personnel, and professionalism of state departments of education have increased to a significant degree.

In light of the activity and apparent progress represented by these and other commendable efforts, it is understandable that the expectations of education policy makers are high and their patiences short. They have been told over and over again that an inadequacy of resources has been responsible for the poor quality of education in the South. They have provided more resources with the assumption that a directly proportional improvement in the quality of education will result.

But even under the best of circumstances, the education of children is a complex process, and the children of the South have never been educated under the best of circumstances. Many of their parents were never educated at all. Current efforts to improve education are occurring within the context of the region's legacy of non-education, mis-education, and education for the purpose of preserving a discriminatory and oppressive social and economic order.

However, this reality has not made it any easier for state legislators and board of education members to accept the results of testing programs, the anecdotal reports of constituents, and the informal experiences of business people that too many students are unable to read, write, and compute at a level which the public believes is necessary. In response to these concerns, the education policy makers have initiated new mandates which are attempts to tell educators what levels of competency are acceptable and to establish consequences for students' inabilities to demonstrate the required levels of competence.

Each Southern state that has initiated such a legislative policy mandate has given its program a distinctive name or title. But all of the mandates may be referred to by the generic term, "minimum competency programs for students." Typically, they have these basic features: (1) Performance objectives are established to communicate expectations about the minimum competencies students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their public school experience; (2) Procedures are established to determine if students have, in fact, mastered the objectives set for them; this usually involves the students taking a pencil-and-paper test; (3) Specific consequences are mandated for those students who do not reach the objectives set for them. They may be provided with additional or different instruction; their parents may be informed of the students' deficiencies; the students may be retained in the same grade or prevented from graduating from high school until they demonstrate their mastery of the required objectives, or students may be given a credential other than a regular high school diploma.

As this report reveals, minimum competency programs have gained wide popularity in the South. In some cases it appears the programs have been initiated in response to public pressure. In other cases it seems state boards of education have seized the initiative in order to preempt action by state legislatures. Some programs are not only the result of policy makers' frustrations with the outcomes of previous efforts to improve education, but also a reflection of sincere concern that the public schools are not adequately educating minority students and those from low-income families.

Minimum competency programs have been attractive to policy makers because they seem to be logical and relatively simple means for assuring that students acquire necessary skills. The programs are predicated on a set of assumptions that may be compelling in the abstract but are questionable when subjected to the test of operational reality. For example, this report reveals that:

- While many minimum competency programs direct local school districts to provide remediation for students who do not meet the required performance standards, most states have not provided additional funds necessary to create remedial programs. In addition, many state departments of education do not have a program to systematically monitor the remediation provided by local districts to determine the extent, nature, quality, and effect of the remediation.
- States are devoting tremendous amounts of time and energy to develop

and implement procedures to assess students' competencies. But the results of these assessments have merely confirmed the results of previous tests and the findings of classroom teachers. Minority students, students from low-income families, students with handicapping conditions, and students whose native language is other than English have performed more poorly on competency tests than other students. Most states with minimum competency programs appear to devote more effort to assessing the needs of disadvantaged students than to ensuring those needs are met.

- In spite of the apparent simplicity of the minimum competency concept, the implementation of the mandated programs requires the creation of a complex management and reporting system. Minimum competency programs are characterized by statewide sequential testing; scoring and analysis of test results; reports of test results back to local districts, schools, and students; reports by local schools and districts to the state concerning the actions taken to respond to the test results and provision of technical assistance to local districts by the state. The operation of this system frequently becomes the focus of the minimum competency program, instead of an assessment of whether the system is achieving the desired result of improving the educational achievement of students.

- Even though the concern about students' minimum competencies has been deep enough to stimulate legislation or policy mandates in nearly every Southern state, that concern has not extended to all students. In many states, the minimum competency mandates do not apply to non-public schools. Some states also exempt some or all students with handicapping conditions. Indeed, the treatment of handicapped students in minimum competency programs suggests they were included in the mandates almost as an afterthought, with no thorough consideration of the application of the concept of minimum competency to handicapped students.

- The minimum competency programs in many states seem to be based on an assumption that it is possible to "make" students learn by imposing penalties on them when they do not meet required performance standards. Provisions requiring that students be retained in the same grade, or that they not be allowed to graduate from high school, may be seen as a way to motivate students to take their school work more seriously, but this punitive approach also has a social, educational and financial cost. It appears that confronting the realities of these costs has caused some states and local communities to back off from strict compliance with these mandates.

- Mandated minimum competency programs are initiated with the recognition that the improvement of students' competencies can only be achieved at the local level, in individual classrooms. For that reason, the programs represent directives to teachers concerning what competencies must be taught, and a statement to students, and their parents, concerning what competencies must be learned. Yet, the practical effect of mandated minimum competency programs is to empower the state, not the local principal or classroom teacher. It is the state departments of education that are assigned the primary responsibility for implementing the programs, and they

are provided with the resources for test development, field testing, scoring, research, and technical assistance. It is the state departments of education that take the initiative and receive the recognition associated with program implementation. In spite of the rhetorical commitment to the concept of "local control" in education, the creation and management of minimum competency programs is another indication that state departments of education in the South are assuming a more prominent position on the region's education landscape.

It should be noted that most minimum competency programs in the South are in their initial stages of implementation. The programs can only achieve their intended benefits if they are buttressed by the funding and the training necessary to provide effective remediation.

Those students who need the most help will not likely get it unless the emphasis of minimum competency programs is shifted from testing children to serving them. The assumption that "diagnosis" will inevitably lead to "treatment" is false, and citizens and policy makers must be vigilant to see that children in educational need are getting the special attention which has been implicitly or explicitly promised by the minimum competency movement.

In the final analysis, the competencies of children can best be assured not by complex testing and accountability systems but by adequately supported principals and teachers with the skills and the inclination to teach and reach children.

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Editorial Note

This report to the Southern Education Foundation was prepared on the basis of information provided by state departments of education, legislative sources, advocacy organizations, and others who have participated in or observed the minimum competency debate in the 12 southern states reviewed here.

Most of the material in this book has been reviewed by appropriate education officials in the states under examination. In a number of instances, the manuscript has been altered in response to their critiques. The author is grateful for their assistance.

The terms used to describe minimum competency programs vary somewhat from one state program to another. It was beyond our scope to translate the various jargon into a common terminology; in most cases, we have simply used the terms found in state documents and other research materials. A glossary has been provided to give the layman some assistance.

This report was not approached as a formal research project, and no formal methodology has been used. The techniques used were those of any good reporter or grassroots researcher, for which we make no apology.

Special thanks to Betzi McCurley for her editorial assistance.

Alabama

Does Alabama have a minimum competency testing program?

In October 1979, the Department of Education piloted a minimum competency program in grades four, seven, and ten in seven districts. Beginning in Spring 1980, tests will be administered statewide to all students in grades three, six, and nine. Sometime after 1981 (the date has not yet been determined) students must pass a competency test in order to graduate from high school.

Who mandated the program?

The State Board of Education initiated a minimum competency program in April 1977. The Board directed the State Superintendent of Education to appoint a committee to develop "minimal competencies criteria for high school graduation and the means for measuring those skills."

This resolution was, however, preceded by at least two calls for competency testing. In March 1977, a 24-member Graduation Requirements Task Force appointed by the Superintendent recommended that students be required to pass a basic skills test in order to graduate. Students who failed to do so would be awarded certificates of attendance rather than regular diplomas. The Alabama General Assembly defeated a 1977 competency testing bill that would have required local boards to develop standards of proficiency in the

academic and basic skills. The bill also would have required the Department of Education to develop examples of minimum academic standards for high school graduation.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

The State Board resolution approved in April 1977 stated an interest in: (1) revising high school graduation requirements; (2) defining the "basic minimum skills for survival in today's society"; and (3) identifying means of measuring students' achievement of the minimum skills. The resolution required that a committee, representative of educators and lay citizens from across the state, be appointed to develop a competency testing program. The Committee of 100, as it became known, was directed to report periodically to the Board and to make its final report by July 1978.

As one of the first tasks, the committee drafted a policy statement which was adopted by the Board. The following points were included:

(1) The Department of Education is to establish minimal standards and competencies and means of assessment;
(2) Local districts may establish additional performance criteria if desired;
(3) Students will be expected to achieve the identified competencies in order to receive a public school diploma. Students who do not achieve the minimum competencies will be awarded some type of certificate for work completed rather than a regular diploma;
(4) Each district is to develop remedial programs for students who fail any competency test;
(5) Handicapped students will be given alternative routes toward a diploma or certificate; and
(6) A process for upgrading students' competencies and skills is to be field tested in selected districts no later than 1979-80 and implemented during the 1980-81 school year.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

The State Department of Education's Division of Instructional Services is primarily responsible for developing the competency testing program, with the Committee of 100 serving as an advisory group.

According to a report from the committee's chairperson, recommendations for committee membership were sought from state and local educators and from a number of educational organizations. No mention is made of recommendations being sought from parent, advocate, or citizens groups. A twenty-member steering committee was initially appointed and five sub-committees formed — Executive, Public Relations, Legislative, Financial Support, and Standards, Competencies, and Assessment.

What is the implementation timetable?

Initially, plans called for reading, mathematics, and language competency

tests to be administered on a pilot basis in Spring 1979. Third, sixth, and ninth graders in the following seven districts were to be tested: Etowah, Pickens and Pike Counties, and Andalusia, Decatur, Dothan and Jasper cities. However, testing was delayed until October 1979 when fourth, seventh, and tenth graders were tested. Statewide testing for third, sixth, and ninth graders will be conducted annually beginning in Spring 1980.

Although the first administration date has not been determined, eleventh grade students will be tested for high school graduation purposes after 1981. There has been some confusion about the implementation plans. Some educators understood that students in the graduating class of 1981 would be required to pass a competency test to receive a diploma. However, Department of Education officials maintain that the program will be phased in more slowly and that the requirement will not become effective until 1982 or later.

How do tests relate to state competency goals and objectives?

The Committee of 100's Standards, Competencies, and Assessment subcommittee has identified "standards" and "competencies" upon which tests are based. Thus far, competencies have been defined which students completing grades three, six, and nine are expected to master. Standards and competencies to be required for high school graduates are still to be developed.

At grade three, all objectives reflect basic academic skills; at grade six, some functional "life skills" are added; and at grade nine a large number of life skills are included. Standards, specific related competencies, and examples of tasks which could be used to measure competencies have been defined. For example, Standard I in reading for grade three is "the student will acquire appropriate word recognition skills." There are eight competencies associated with Standard I, one of which is to "identify the 220 Dolch Basic Sight Words." The number of standards and competencies which have been defined is shown below:

	Reading		Language		Math	
	Standards	Comp.	Standards	Comp.	Standards	Comp.
Grade 3	3	22	13	27	6	16
Grade 6	3	24	12	24	6	33
Grade 9	6	20	10	22	6	45

The subcommittee held a two-day conference in June 1978 to give superintendents and administrators an opportunity to react to a draft of the standards and competencies. Also, eight regional meetings were held during the summer, 1978, to provide teachers and citizens an opportunity to review and comment on the draft standards.

During the 1978-79 school year, the Department of Education held workshops in the seven systems chosen for the pilot testing to familiarize teachers with the standards, competencies, and type of tests to be ad-

ministered. Thirteen workshops were held in the summer, 1979, to begin to introduce educators from other districts to the program and to the competencies which students will be expected to master.

What tests are to be used?

Test items have been developed by a Testing Task Force made up of 43 people, six of whom are members of the Committee of 100's Standards, Competencies, and Assessment subcommittee. The Department of Education selected twenty-seven teachers from across the state, nine with expertise in reading, nine in mathematics, and nine in language arts. Within each skill area, three teachers were included from each of the appropriate grade levels (three, six, and nine). The ten remaining task force members are Department of Education testing specialists and consultants from the Educational Testing Service who reviewed all test items developed by the teachers.

In early 1980, a test committee composed of secondary teachers will begin drafting a graduation competency test for eleventh graders. The test is expected to measure both basic academic and life skills.

In response to questions about cultural bias in the tests, Isabelle Thomasson, the Committee of 100 chairperson, claims that the tests will be bias-free because they are developed by Alabama teachers and are not standardized, norm-referenced instruments.

How are test results to be used?

Competency tests administered in the third, sixth, and ninth grades are to be used to determine students' mastery or non-mastery of mandated competencies.

No minimum performance standards have yet been formally adopted. The Department of Education recommends that students successfully complete approximately 70 percent of items for each competency. The percentage of correct responses required would vary slightly depending upon the number of items measuring each competency.

The Department of Education has specified that schools, school systems, and personnel are not to be evaluated or compared on the basis of test results. However, the Department has not specified that *students* may not be so compared and evaluated. In a statement concerning use of test results, the Department maintains that promotion and retention decisions are made at the the school and local system level. In some systems results may be weighed heavily in determining a student's class placement.

The competency tests which will be administered during the eleventh and twelfth grades will be used to determine students' eligibility to receive a high school diploma.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

Policies adopted by the State Board require local districts to provide remediation to students who fail any of the competency test. No funds have been allocated for remedial programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Students identified for special education classes will not be required to take the standard competency tests, according to Department of Education officials. A task force within the Department is working to develop appropriate policies for testing handicapped students. Alternative methods of assessment will be explored which may allow handicapped students to receive regular diplomas even though they do not take the regularly administered eleventh grade competency test.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The competency testing program will be implemented only in the public schools.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

Results from the October 1979 pilot test were reported in February 1980 to the local districts. Overall results are not available from the Department of Education.

For each student tested the school received a list of the skills being measured marked with either a plus (indicating mastery) or a minus (indicating non-mastery). The committee which developed the tests determined how many items should be correctly answered to determine mastery of a skill.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the test?

The competency test for high school graduation is to be administered at the end of the eleventh grade, and students will have one additional opportunity to take the test at the end of their senior year.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

Abigail Turner, an attorney with Legal Services, has raised questions about both state and local testing programs in Alabama. For the pilot testing of the statewide tests in Fall 1979, no racial data were collected on the students included in the sample. Turner maintains that there is no way to determine whether the tests contain culturally or racially biased items. Another problem has been the lack of public information about the implementation of high school competency testing.

According to Turner, Legal Services is involved in a suit filed in one district in behalf of a group of elementary school students who were promoted but then later demoted on the basis of standardized test results. In some districts, local competency tests for high school graduation are being adopted, and standardized tests are being used to determine class placements. Turner is particularly concerned about the impact of the testing programs on minority students.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

Many of the details concerning statewide implementation of the testing program remain unsettled, particularly concerning the development and administration of a test for high school graduation. Standards and competencies must be defined and a test developed by 1981. The year in which testing for high school graduation becomes effective must also be determined.

Tests which were administered on a pilot basis in October 1979 to fourth, eighth, and tenth graders will be given statewide in Spring 1980 to students in grades three, six, and nine.

REFERENCE

Adopted Policies for the Committee of 100. (Mimeographed Paper)

The Alabama Competency Program. (Undated Mimeographed Paper)

Governor's Education Program (Undated Mimeographed Paper)

Minimum Competencies Examination Results, September-May, 1978, Birmingham Public Schools.

Report of Committee of 100-Minimal Competencies for High School Graduation. July 1978. (Mimeographed Paper)

Resolution Adopted by Alabama State Board of Education, April 27, 1977.

Schedule of Activities for Competency Testing. (Undated Mimeographed Paper).

Standards and Competencies in Reading, Mathematics and Language for Grades 3, 6, and 9.

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Arkansas

Does Arkansas have a minimum competency testing program?

The State Department of Education is developing a basic skills testing program in reading, mathematics, and communications for students in grades three, six, and eight. The tests are intended to be used for diagnostic purposes and not to determine promotion or retention. Passage of a competency test is not a requirement for high school graduation.

Who mandated the program?

The Arkansas General Assembly enacted educational accountability legislation in 1977 and 1979 which initiated competency testing. Two acts (484 and 514) were passed in 1977. Act 666, The Educational Assessment Act, was passed in 1979, giving the program its current focus.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

Act 484 (1977) called for: (1) the establishment of educational goals for the state of Arkansas, and (2) the identification of minimum performance goals for certain grades and subject areas, unspecified in the legislation.

A second education bill passed in 1977, Act 514, required school districts to report the results of all locally administered standardized tests to the State Department of Education. The State Department, in turn, was directed to

compile the data from the local districts and report the results to the General Assembly.

A third bill, Act 609, was introduced, debated, and defeated during the 1977 legislative session. That act would have: (1) established a competency testing program to determine a student's eligibility for graduation, and (2) required each district to develop a pupil progression program with particular emphasis on the pupil's mastery of the basic skills before promotion from the third, fifth, eighth, or eleventh grades. Essentially, the act called for the replication of the Florida competency testing program in Arkansas.

In March, 1979, the Education Assessment Act, which initiated minimum competency testing, was passed. Act 666 mandates the administration of "criterion-referenced minimum performance tests" to all students in grades three, six, and eight beginning in 1981-82.

The stated purposes of the act are:

(1) To measure pupil performance in the basic subjects taught generally in the schools of the state;
(2) To provide data concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional programs of the various school districts of the state;
(3) To provide information to assist in planning education programs and identifying educational priorities;
(4) To provide teachers with diagnostic information; and
(5) To assess how well districts and schools are meeting state and school district educational goals and minimum performance goals.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

The Department of Education's Division of Instructional Services coordinated the development of statewide goals and minimum performance goals mandated by the 1977 legislature. The Division was also involved in drafting the 1979 Educational Assessment Act (Act 666).

Test development and administration will be coordinated by a new Division of Planning and Management. Initially, $527,000 was to be allocated to the Department of Education to administer both the minimum performance testing program and a standardized testing program. However, the Department has actually received only $257,000. One new position, rather than the three hoped for by the Department, has been created to coordinate the program.

Act 666 specifies that teachers are to be consulted by the Department regarding development and/or selection of performance goals and tests. Citizen imput was sought in developing general statewide goals through representation on a Goals Committee and public hearings. No mechanism has been established for citizen participation in developing the actual testing program.

What is the implementation timeline?

Act 666 specifies a timeline for implementing the minimum performance testing program:

(1) By October 1, 1979, minimum performance goals already identified for grades one, three, and six were to be revised and goals for grade eight were to be developed;
(2) Criterion-referenced, minimum performance tests are to be administered to a sample of students in grades three, six, and eight in Spring 1980;
(3) Results are to be analyzed and revised and minimum performance tests are to be administered again to a sample of students in grades three, six, and eight, during the 1980-81 school year;
(4) Beginning in 1981-82, minimum performance tests are to be administered statewide to all third, sixth, and eighth grade students.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

Act 484 (1977) directed the State Board of Education to establish "educational goals for the state," including "minimum performance goals." Two distinct sets of goals were developed: (1) educational goals for Arkansas, and (2) statewide minimum educational goals.

To identify broad educational goals, a Statewide Goals Committee was appointed by the Director of the Department of Education in 1977. The committee was made up of 91 people, about fifty percent of whom were educators and fifty percent other interested citizens. At least one person from each of the state's 75 counties participated. Public hearings were held in each county, which involved a total of 7,000 people in the process of developing statewide goals.

The five educational goals defined by the Statewide Goals Committee are:

(1) To help each learner master basic skills in reading, math, communication and problem solving;
(2) To help learners achieve functional understanding of economic and occupational skills and options;
(3) To help each learner develop to the full range of his/her potential;
(4) To help learners progress toward becoming healthy, responsible and humane citizens; and
(5) To help learners maintain healthful living.

The Director of the Education Department also appointed a fifteen-member committee to identify minimum performance goals. The committee was composed of 12 teachers, two principals, and one elementary supervisor. Working with three consultants, the committee developed goals and "student performance standards" in reading, mathematics, and communications skills (listening, speaking, writing, and spelling) for students in grades one, three, and six.

The defined goals and standards relate to basic, academic skills rather than functional, "life" skills. An example of a minimum performance goal and student performance standard is shown below.

READING FOR GRADE SIX

Goal 2: The student will increase reading comprehension

Standard* 2.1: The student will state the main idea of a paragraph

(*one of thirteen standards related to goal two)

The goals and standards originally developed in 1977 for grades one, three, and six were later revised and expanded to include grades K through 8. The State Board of Education adopted the revised goals in September, 1979.

The Educational Assessment Act of 1979 specifies that teachers are to be consulted by the Department of Education concerning development and/or selection of performance goals and tests. Citizen involvement has been limited to the development of the broad, statewide goals. No lay citizens particpated in developing the minimum performance goals and no mechanism has been established for citizen participation in planning the testing program.

What tests are to be used?

Tests are being developed by the Department of Education and will be field tested in April, 1980. Criterion-referenced tests developed in other states were reviewed by a committee of local educators and Department staff. Items which matched Arkansas objectives were chosen for the state's minimum performance tests.

How are test results to be used?

Act 666 specifies that tests are to provide diagnostic information on individual students and data on instructional programs. Test results are not intended to be used to decide promotion or retention.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

Local districts will be required to develop plans to implement improvements in instruction" using test results. There is no specific requirement, or funding, for remedial programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Handicapped students who are mainstreamed in a regular classroom for more than fifty percent of instructional time will be included in testing. The Division of Special Education is developing guidelines and modifications for testing handicapped students.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

Act 666 discusses testing in the public schools in Arkansas and does not

refer to private schools. However, the issue of whether to include the private schools in the assessment program is being considered by the Department of Education.

How have students performed on the tests?

No results will be reported on the sample testing in Spring 1980 and 1981. Scores will first be reported when tests are administered statewide in 1981-82.

No minimum passing score on the tests will be established. Students' performance on all test objectives, each of which will be measured by four items, will be reported. Mastery will be demonstrated by correct responses to three out of four items on each objective.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

Third, sixth, and eighth graders will take the minimum performance tests one time.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

According to Arkansas Education Association staff member Evalina Berry, the AEA was instrumental in defeating legislation in 1977 which would have created a competency testing program for promotion and high school graduation. There is general support for the testing program mandated in 1979, says Berry, because the bill provides for two years of pilot testing, and for the use of test results only for diagnostic purposes.

The minimum performance goals upon which the tests will be based were published in January, 1979. Regional meetings were then held across the state by the Department of Education to present and discuss the goals. But, explained Berry, the meetings were held from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. which effectively excluded teachers and many parents.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

Criterion-referenced tests will be administered to a sample of students in grades three, six, and eight chosen to participate in the Spring 1980 testing. Following the pilot testing and analysis of results, instruments will be revised and administered to another sample of third, sixth and eighth graders the following year. Tests will be administered statewide for the first time in 1981-82.

REFERENCE

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Florida

Does Florida have a minimum competency testing program?

The Department of Education administers two State Student Assessment Testing (SSAT) programs. SSAT-Part I consists of basic skills tests in reading, writing, and mathematics which are administered to all students in grades three, five, eight, and eleven. Mastery of the basic skills is required for promotion from these grades. All eleventh grade students take SSAT-II, a test which measures the ability to apply basic math and reading skills in practical, everyday situations.

Beginning with the class of 1979, passage of the SSAT-II was to be a criterion for high school graduation. However, a class action suit (*Debra P. v. Turlington*) was filed in federal court to prevent the state from denying diplomas to students who failed the competency test. In July 1979, Judge George Carr ruled that the test results could not be used as a basis for withholding diplomas for four years, until the 1982-83 school year. In August, the Department of Education appealed the court decision to the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

Who mandated the program?

Florida's statewide student assessment programs are legislatively mandated through Educational Accountability Acts, the first of which was passed in 1971. Revised and expanded Accountability Acts were passed in 1974, 1975, 1976, and 1978.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

Key provisions of the 1971 Educational Accountability Act included:

(1) Yearly establishment of statewide objectives for each grade level and subject;
(2) Assessment of student achievement of these objectives;
(3) Public reporting of the results for the State, each district, and each school;
(4) Assessment of basic skills in reading in 1971-72, reading, writing, and mathematics in 1972-73, with other subjects added in 1973-74. The grades to be tested were not specified.

The 1974 amendment to the act required that all students in grades three and six be assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics in 1974-75. All students in grades three through six were to be tested by 1976.

An expanded Accountability Act was passed in 1976 with the following provisions:

(1) Minimum performance standards, especially in reading, writing, and mathematics were to be determined by the Commissioner of Education, with the approval of the State Board;
(2) Uniform, statewide testing was to be conducted in grades three, five, eight, and eleven;
(3) By July 1, 1977, each district's school board was to establish a comprehensive program of pupil progression, based upon an evaluation of each pupil's performance. Particular emphasis was to be placed on a student's mastery of the basic skills, particularly reading, before s/he was promoted from the third, fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades;
(4) Beginning with the 1978-79 school year, each district school board was to establish standards for high school graduation which included mastery of the basic skills and satisfactory performance in functional literacy as determined by the State Board;
(5) Remediation was to be provided to students who did not meet the minimum standards; and
(6) Students who did not meet the minimum standards by the end of their senior year were to receive certificates of completion rather than regular diplomas.

The 1978 revisions of the 1976 Accountability Act specified the following requirements for high school graduation:

(1) Mastery of minimum performance standards in reading, writing, and mathematics for the eleventh grade;
(2) Passage of a functional literacy examination; and
(3) Completion of a minimum number of academic credits and any other requirements prescribed by the school board.

These legislative mandates have resulted in: (1) a two-part statewide student assessment testing program; (2) the use of SSAT-I results in making

grade promotion decisions, and (3) a graduation requirement that students must demonstrate mastery in the basic skills to receive a high school diploma.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

The Department of Education has been responsible for determining minimum objectives, selecting or developing and administering tests, and determining passing standards. Within the department, the Student Assessment Section has the primary responsibility for administering the program. The views of local educators have been solicited through a number of ad hoc advisory committees. Final policy decisions are made by the State Board of Education.

What is the implementation timetable?

Some type of statewide student assessment has been conducted annually in Florida since 1971-72. Although this report is primarily focused on testing since the 1977-78 school year, Table 1 provides some general information about the testing which occurred between 1971 and 1977.

In October 1977, basic skills tests in reading, writing, and math were administered in grades three, five, eight, and eleven. In addition, a "functional literacy test" was administered for the first time to eleventh graders as a criterion for high school graduation. The basic skills tests (now called SSAT-I) are administered annually in the fall. The functional literacy test (now SSAT-II) is administered twice annually, in the fall and spring.

Competency testing to determine eligibility for a high school diploma was mandated in 1976. The 1979 graduating class was to be the first affected by the test requirement.

A Task Force on Educational Assessment programs appointed by the State Board of Education in 1978 discussed the implementation schedule as follows.

> The problems created by the abrupt schedule for implementing the Functional Literacy Test were most severe for the members of Florida high school graduation class of 1979. At the eleventh hour and with virtually no warning, these students were told that the requirements for graduation had been changed. They were suddenly required to pass a test constructed under the pressure of time and covering content that was presumed to be elementary but that their schools may or may not have taught them recently, well, or perhaps at all . . . The Task Force believes that the schedule for implementing statewide high school graudation standards was too severe.

FLORIDA: TABLE 1

Florida's Statewide Testing Program 1971-1977

Year	Authorization	Grades Tested	Skills Tested	Students Tested	Group(s) with Major Responsibility for Test Development
1971-72	Educational Accountability Act of 1971	2 and 4	Reading	Random sample	Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California at Los Angeles
1972-73		3, 6 and 9	Reading Writing Mathematics	Random sample	Two Florida school districts Florida State University Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich (test publisher)
1973-74		3, 6 and 9	Reading Writing Mathematics Science	Random sample	
1974-75	Educational Accountability Act of 1974	3, 6 and 9	Reading Writing Mathematics	All students - 359, 718	Westinghouse Learning Corporation
1975-76		3 and 6	Communication Skills Mathematics	All students - 227,000	Two consultants, with some previously used items retained
1976-77	Educational Accountability Act of 1976	3 and 5	Communication Skills Mathematics	All students - 200,000	Reading - U. of W. Florida Writing - Florida Internatl U Math - U. of S. Florida

The *Debra P. v. Turlington* legal challenge to the testing program resulted in a change in the implementation schedule. The decision of the court handed down on July 12, 1979 held that:

(1) Until 1982-83, the requirement that students must pass the SSAT-II in order to graduate from high school is a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act and is therefore prohibited; and
(2) The schedule of implementation is a violation of due process rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

In reaching the decision that the competency testing program, as implemented, violated Black students' rights, the court found that the effects of past racial discrimination were being perpetuated and reemphasized. Although *de jure* segregation was legally abolished in Florida in 1967, desegregation did not actually begin to any extent until 1971. Thus the plaintiffs spent their first four years of school in a racially segregated system in which the resources and facilities of the Black schools were manifestly inferior to white schools.

The court also pointed out a number of problems which particularly affected Black children following desegregation in 1971: Prior inferior education; disparate busing schedules; lingering racial stereotypes; disproportionate termination of Black administrators, principals, and teachers; and high incidence of suspension. In the court's opinion, "punishing the victims of past discrimination for deficits created by an inferior educational environment neither constitutes a remedy nor creates better educational opportunities."

How do the tests relate to state competency goals or objectives?

The assessment programs are based on "minimum student performance standards" which were adopted by the Board of Education in April 1977.

In 1976-77, statewide task forces of teachers, curriculum specialists, and lay persons assisted the Department of Education in developing a first draft of the minimum performance standards in the basic skills for grades three, five, eight, and eleven. All school districts were invited to form committees to review the proposed standards; 46 of Florida's 67 districts participated. Three statewide committees, one of lay persons, one of teachers, and one of principals and district directors of instruction, were formed to review the proposed standards.

In addition to the performance standards, more specific skills were identified. An example of a related standard skill and (SSAT-I) test item might be:

MATHEMATICS

Standard: The student will add whole numbers
Skill: The student will add four three-digit numbers without regrouping
Item:

$$\begin{array}{r} 125 \\ 322 \\ 302 \\ +230 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

The number of standards, skills, and items included on the SSAT-I and SSAT-II in 1978-79 are shown in Table 2.

The objectives covered on the SSAT-II were determined by the Department of Education in December 1976 and adopted by the State Board in May 1976. A letter from the director of the Department of Education's Student Assessment Section to a state senator in 1976 states:

> . . . most educators have not thought in terms of functional (i.e. practical or applied) skills for high high school students, therefore the Department of Education does not have a pre-existent set of functional objectives which may be assessed.

The eleven communications objectives and thirteen mathematics objectives are practical applications of eleventh grade skills objectives.

An example of the difference between a basic skills item and a functional, applied question such as might be found on the SSAT-II is shown below:

Basic skills item	**Functional item**
4% of 36 =	The Florida sales tax is 4%.
	Tax on a $36.00 purchase =

In the *Debra P. v. Turlington* decision, the court notes that the Department of Education distributed the basic skill and functional literacy objectives to all schools during the summer of 1977. The first SSAT-II tests were administered in October 1977. The court concludes that "the results of the first administration reflect the obvious inadequacy of the prior instruction in the stated objectives."

The court ruled, in disagreement with the Plaintiffs, that the SSAT-II instrument is valid and free of racial or cultural bias. The Department can continue administering the test although results may not be used to withhold diplomas until the 1982-83 school year.

What tests are used?

The Department of Education established contracts with a number of institutions to develop basic skills and functional literacy tests for 1977-78. Contractors with major responsibilities for developing the initial versions of the tests are outlined below:

Grades three and five	Reading, University of West Florida Writing, Florida International University Mathematics, University of South Florida
Grade eight	Florida State University
Grade eleven Basic Skills	University of South Florida University of West Florida
Grade eleven Functional Literacy	Educational Testing Service

FLORIDA: TABLE 2

Number of Standards, Skills, and Questions Tested by Grade and Subtest for the 1978-79 Statewide Assessment Tests

		Standards	Skills	Questions
SSAT-I				
Grade 3	Reading	7	9	49
	Writing	4	6	25
	Math	10	14	66
		21	29	140
Grade 5	Reading	10	14	76
	Writing	7	14	51
	Math	16	24	117
		33	52	244
Grade 8	Reading	10	17	87
	Writing	6	13	72
	Math	14	22	109
		30	52	268
Grade 11	Reading	10	14	69
	Writing	4	6	34
	Math	11	18	87
		25	38	190
SSAT-II				
Grade 11 Functional Literacy	Communications		11	60
	Mathematics		13	60
			24	120

The Department of Education, with consultation from local educators, reviewed a number of functional literacy tests before deciding to contract with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to develop a new test for Florida in December 1976. The test was developed within three months, and field tests were conducted in five counties in March 1977. Additional test items were developed by National Evaluation Systems (NES) of Amherst, Massachusetts, based on item specifications written for the Department by ETS.

The Department of Education has constructed five alternate forms of the SSAT-II using items generated by NES and ETS, items leased from the *Adult Performance Level Test*, and some items written by Department staff.

How are test results to be used?

In August 1979, Ralph Turlington, Commissioner of Education, stated that the purpose of the testing program "is to improve the quality of education in Florida's public schools." Test results, he further maintains, will continue to be used "for the purpose of improving student skills."

SSAT-I test results are used to identify students who lack basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, and who need remedial instruction. The 1976 Educational Accountability Act holds districts responsible for establishing pupil progression plans, with performance on the basic skills tests being used in determining promotion or retention.

The SSAT-II program is used to identify eleventh grade students requiring remediation. The program also established passage of the test as a criterion for high school graduation beginning in 1979. However, as noted earlier, the court's decision in the *Debra P. v. Turlington* case delays use of the test as a graduation requirement for four years, until 1982-83. Local districts may award certificates of completion rather than regular diplomas to students who do not master the basic skills covered on the eleventh grade SSAT-I. Students must either pass the state basic skills test, *or* demonstrate mastery of the skills through an alternate means chosen by the local district.

In June 1979, thirty-seven districts chose the option of awarding certificates of completion to students who did not demonstrate mastery of all of the eleventh grade minimum performance standards. In 30 districts, no certificates of completion were awarded. All non-handicapped students who graduated in those districts received regular diplomas.

A total of 1,125 students received certificates of completion in June 1979. Of these students, 749, or 67 percent, were Black. Approximately 90,000 students completed twelfth grade in June 1979. The number of juniors who took the SSAT-II in October 1977 was approximately 116,000. According to Department of Education officials, a 22 percent withdrawal rate between eleventh and twelfth grade is not substantially higher than in earlier years.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The 1976 Accountability Act mandates that students who do not meet minimum standards are to receive remedial instruction. Ten million dollars in state compensatory funds were allocated for 1977-78, twenty-six million for

1978-79, and twenty-eight and a half million for 1979-80. Local districts are responsible for planning and carrying out remedial programs for students who fail the SSAT-II, as well as for those who fall below the standards on the basic skills tests. The grades for which state compensatory funds are targeted are selected by the districts, some of whom focussed on two or three grades, while others included all grades. A total of 168,805 students were included in state compensatory education programs in 1978-79, with an average expenditure of $155 per student.

During the Fall 1978 semester, a Task Force on the Educational Assessment Programs, appointed by the Commissioner of Education, studied a small sample of remedial programs and concluded that the statewide remediation effort was "sixty-seven individual county programs that vary widely in approach, quality, and degree of disruption caused to other important school functions." The following conditions were reported:

(1) Considerable variability was found in both the nature and quality of remedial programs;
(2) Little monitoring of the instructional quality of the remedial programs was carried out by the department;
(3) Some remedial programs were conducted before and after school hours, which created scheduling problems for students who depended on bus transportation or who had after-school jobs;
(4) Some programs had staffing problems (e.g., out-of-field teachers were hired, students were assigned to standard Engligh and math classes where regular teachers were expected to provide remediation, and regular teachers were given salary supplements to teach remedial classes after school).
(5) In some cases, insufficient resources for remediation led to a reduction in electives and increased class sizes in regular subjects; and,
(6) Appropriate instructional materials were lacking.

The Commissioner of Education maintains, however, that remediation has been effective. "Test scores have consistently improved throughout the state and at all grade levels. This accomplishment is due in no small part to the competency testing program and related remedial programs."

A major concern that was raised in the *Debra P. v. Turlington* suit is that the remediation programs frequently result in segregated classes. The court held that the programs were not in violation of federal law and should be allowed to continue. In the court's view, the purpose of the programs has been to assist students and to provide better educational opportunities. Thus, the use of test results for structuring remedial classes was judged constitutional even though some classes are disproportionately Black.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

As the testing programs have been developed, special provisions have begun to be adopted for testing handicapped students. For the 1977-78

assessment, local districts were responsible for establishing testing policies for handicapped students.

The performance of handicapped students on the functional literacy test in October 1977 is shown in Table 3. As with non-handicapped students, performance was higher on the communications test than on the mathematics test. The percentage of students passing the math test varied from one percent for educable mentally handicapped (EMH) students to 33 percent for language impaired and visually impaired. On the communications test, the passing rate ranged from six percent for EMH students to 71 percent for language impaired students.

In the 1978 Educational Accountability Act, the legislature enacted a statute establishing special requirements for high school graduation for exceptional students. The law states that any student who has been classified as educable mentally retarded (EMR), trainable mentally retarded (TMR), deaf, specific learning disabled, or emotionally handicapped is not required to take the eleventh grade competency test. However, students exempted from the test would be automatically ineligible to receive a regular high school diploma To attempt to qualify for a standard diploma, a handicapped student who has been exempted by the legislation must request to take the SSAT-II.

FLORIDA: TABLE 3

Florida Statewide Assessment Tests -II
Grade 11

October 1977

Percentage of Handicapped Students Passing Math and Communications Tests

	Mathematics		Communications	
	N Tested	% Passing	N Tested	% Passing
Speech/ Lang. imp.	509	33	506	71
Deaf	126	18	126	47
Hard of hearing	49	29	49	65
Physically imp.	109	14	110	67
Emot. disturbed	114	17	113	56
Socially maladj.	79	25	79	49
Spec. L. D.	502	17	499	49
EMH	479	1	479	6
Visually imp.	55	33	54	33

For exceptional students who choose to take the SSAT-II test, a number of procedural modifications are allowed:

(1) Flexible scheduling — the test may be administered during several brief sessions;
(2) Flexible setting — the test may be administered individually or in a small group setting;
(3) Recording of answers — answers may be marked in a test booklet, typed, or indicated to a proctor, and are then transcribed by a proctor to a machine scoreable answer sheet;
(4) Revised format — large print and Braille tests and magnifying devices may be used; and
(5) Auditory aids — appropriate portions of the tests may be tape recorded or read by a narrator. No portion of a test designed to measure reading skills may be tested through the use of audio aids.

State Board regulations specify which procedural modifications are allowed, depending upon the classification of a student's handicap. For example, procedures authorized for mentally retarded students are flexible scheduling, flexible setting, and recording of answers. Learning disabled students may, however, use any of the five modifications.

In October 1978, some handicapped students participated in the high school competency testing, although fewer were tested than in October 1977. The majority of handicapped students tested passed the communications test. The percentage of handicapped students passing the mathematics test was substantially higher in 1978 than in 1977 (Table 4).

Alternative minimum performance standards and basic skills tests have been developed specifically for hearing impaired students. An eleventh grade basic skills test is also being developed for EMR students by Florida State University and the Department of Education hopes that the test will be ready for statewide administration in Spring 1980.

Standards and tests developed for handicapped students are based on the rationale that they will be unable to achieve at the same rate or level as non-handicapped students. Some special educators question the adoption of testing policies affecting categories of exceptional students when individual needs and abilities vary widely. The issue is particularly critical when a high school diploma is at stake.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

Both SSAT-I and SSAT-II tests apply only to Florida's public schools. In the *Debra P. v. Turlington* case, the judge ruled that the state has no relationship with private schools which would compel their inclusion in the SSAT-II testing program.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

Mastery levels for the basic skills tests and minimum scores for the SSAT-II were established by the Department of Education in 1977.

FLORIDA: TABLE 4

Florida Statewide Assessment Test-II

October 1978

Percentage of Handicapped Students Passing the Math and Communications Tests

	Mathematics		Communications	
	N Tested	% Passing	N Tested	% Passing
Speech/ Lang. imp.	181	40	176	82
Deaf	128	52	127	90
Hard of hearing	83	49	81	85
Physically imp.	143	38	142	87
Emot. disturbed	190	42	187	81
Socially maladj.	33	48	33	82
Specific L. D.	652	27	649	70
EMH	81	9	80	24

In the SSAT-I program, total test scores, as well as a student's performance on each standard and skill, are reported. The initial scoring system was fairly complex. Students were required to correctly answer 70 percent of items measuring each standard. In addition students were required to master at least half of the skills measuring each standard.

In August 1978, the State Board changed the criteria for mastery of the SSAT-II. Students are now required to master 70 percent of the total number of items on the math section and 70 percent on the reading portion. The Board dropped the requirement that one half of the skills within each section had to be mastered.

The SSAT-II tests were taken in October 1977 and approximately 400 students who had failed under the old scoring system were able to pass.

Department of Education officials state that the 70 percent cutoff point for the SSAT-II was chosen because it had political credibility and because the majority of schools generally regard 70 percent as an acceptable passing score. They also maintain that statistical studies showed that a 70 percent cutoff minimized the chance of misclassifying students.

The change in criteria was prompted by a challenge brought by a parent who charged that the Department set scoring procedures in a closed meeting

in violation of the State's Administrative Procedures Act. A hearing officer concurred. But a district court later held that the initial criteria for mastery had been legally determined. The Board did not, however, reinstate the former scoring system. In 1978, legislation was passed exempting the senior year. Also, in 1979 the Florida legislature passed a bill allowing students to continue school for a thirteenth year. Students who do not remain in school have the option of passing the test through an adult basic education program.

Students who do not pass the eleventh grade basic skills test (SSAT-I) may be required by the local district to retake the test prior to graduation. A district may also require a student to demonstrate mastery of the skills through some other means.

Table 5 shows the cumulative history of SSAT-II through the October 1979 administration.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

The *Debra P. v. Turlington* court case was initially filed on behalf of ten Black students in Hillsborough County. The plaintiffs contended that the program is racially biased and perpetuates the effects of past, purposeful discrimination. The program, they maintained, violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act.

The court ruled that the program violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment until 1982-83. This decision was based on the fact that the schools were generally segregated until 1971.

Rev. Moses Stith, Pinellas County School Board member, is concerned that Black students will be most harmed if certificates of attendance are awarded instead of regular high school diplomas. "It will put a kind of stigma on a student," he says. "I know what it is to be classified as a second class citizen." Stith feels that schools should be concerned with providing a quality education, not grading students who are graduating.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

Florida intends to continue operating the testing and remedial programs as planned, with the only change being that diplomas will not be withheld based on SSAT-II test results. In August 1979, the Commissioner of Education stated that his "committment and support for maintaining the competency program are as strong as ever." On the same date he announced that the *Debra P. v. Turlington* decision was being appealed to the Fifth U. S Circuit Court of Appeals. He also stated that he anticipates "further (legal) challenges on other points" from opponents of Florida's testing program.

FLORIDA: TABLE 5

Florida State Student Assessment Test, Part II: Statewide Cumulative History
Number of Students Taking the Test and Percentage Passing

Race	October 1977 Number Tested	October 1977 Percent Passing	October 1978 Number Tested	October 1978 Percent Passing	October 1979 Number Tested	October 1979 Percent Passing
	COMMUNICATIONS					
White	82,344	97	77,494	99	75,792	99
Black	22,957	74	19,834	89	17,577	91
Other	10,663	--	10,004	--	9,532	--
All	115,964	92	107,332	97	102,901	97
	MATHEMATICS					
White	82,380	76	77,993	83	76,039	85
Black	22,980	23	20,351	40	18,188	47
Other	10,671	--	10,157	--	9,673	--
All	116,031	64	108,501	74	103,900	78
	COMMUNICATIONS AND MATHEMATICS					
White	82,344	75	77,471	83	75,737	86
Black	22,957	22	19,811	39	17,537	47
Other	10,600	--	9,991	--	9,513	--
All	115,901	63	107,273	74	102,787	78

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Georgia

Does Georgia have a minimum competency testing program?

A competency based education program was initiated in all public secondary schools in Fall 1979. The program, which includes new high school graduation requirements, will be phased in over the next four years. Students entering ninth grade in 1981-82 will be required to demonstrate competence in basic academic skills in order to receive a regular diploma. Entering freshmen in 1982-83 will be required to demonstrate competence in basic skills as well as certain other "life role skills." A criterion-referenced basic skills test will be administered statewide, while local districts will be responsible for measuring the "life role skills."

Who mandated the program?

The minimum competency testing program was mandated by the State Board of Education (State Board Policy 30-700). The policy, entitled "High School Graduation Requirements," was adopted in 1976 and amended in 1978.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

The Board policy establishes a number of new attendance, course, and testing requirements. As one requirement for graduation, students must

demonstrate competence in a number of "contemporary life role skills" identified by the State Board of Education. The following adult life roles and skills were identified by the Board:

(1) *Learner* — reading, writing, listening, analyzing, speaking, computing, acquiring knowledge independently

(2) *Individual* — improving personal physical and mental health, using leisure time, establishing a personal family role

(3) *Citizen* — using and contributing to society in an appropriate manner and interacting with the environment in a responsible way.

(4) *Consumer* — using available resources in an efficient and beneficial way

(5) *Producer* — selecting, pursuing, and, if necessary, changing a career.

The basic academic skills related to the role of the Learner are to be measured by a criterion-referenced test administered statewide. Local districts are to assess students' competence in the other life roles.

The Board policy also requires each local district to submit a Comprehensive Competency Based Education Plan describing how the new graduation requirements will be implemented.

All students who complete school will receive certificates of performance verifying the skills or competencies which they have acquired. A student may receive both a certificate of performance and a diploma. However, students who do not demonstrate competence in the life role skills, or who do not meet other graduation requirements, will receive only certificates.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

Policy 30-700 outlines responsibilities of the State Department of Education and local school districts. Local districts must: (1) Develop Comprehensive Competency Based Education Plans; (2) identify objectives related to life role skills based on meaningful community input; (3) develop "performance indicators" to determine if objectives are met; and (4) establish a system for reporting to students and parents on the attainment of performance objectives.

The Department of Education must develop or select and administer a criterion-referenced test which measures the basic academic skills considered necessary for the role of the Learner.

The Department of Education's Office of Planning and Development is responsible for providing technical assistance to local agencies in developing Comprehensive Competency Based Education Plans. That office is also responsible for providing criteria which can be used in monitoring schools' compliance with State Board policy 30-700.

What is the implementation timetable?

From 1976 to 1979, a pilot competency-based program was conducted in ten school districts. Each of the districts received $75,000 for the three years. The systems helped to identify competencies which should be required, developed related curriculum, and administered competency tests.

Statewide competency testing in the basic academic skills will begin in 1981-82. Students entering ninth grade in 1981 must demonstrate competence in the basic skills in order to receive a high school diploma. The following year, local districts must begin to assess students' competence in the other life roles in addition to administering the state test. The first class which will be affected by the competency test requirement will graduate in 1985.

Local district Comprehensive Competency Based Education Plans are to be developed in three phases. Plans for Phase I were to be submitted to the Department of Education in January 1980. Phase II is due in January 1981, Phase III in January 1982. The Department of Education has specified the elements to be covered in the Plans. To be included are procedures for revising curricula, improving instruction, incorporating the life role skills, and assessing students' competence.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

In Policy 30-700, the State Board has identified ten "performance standards" relating to the life role of the Learner. The statewide competency test is intended to be based on the ten standards. The standards relate to broad skill areas rather than specific instructional objectives. For example, three of the standards are: the student employs estimation, approximation, and calculation skills in everyday living situations; the student uses a variety of information resources to obtain assistance and information; and, the student reads and interprets communication on a functional level. The ten systems involved in the three year pilot study (1976-79) helped to identify competencies which will be measured by the test.

Local districts are directed by the State Board to develop "performance objectives" which relate to the life roles of the individual, citizen, consumer, and producer. Districts must then develop methods to assess students' mastery of the objectives.

What tests are to be used?

A criterion-referenced test of basic academic skills (reading, writing, and mathematics) is being developed by the Department of Education.

Local districts must determine how to assess life role skills. Methods of evaluation are not limited to paper and pencil tests but may include applied or simulated performance assessments and successful completion of relevant courses.

How are test results to be used?

In Spring 1980, the State Board will decide how results of the statewide criterion-referenced test will be used. The Board policy (30-700) states that students must demonstrate competence in the life role skill of the Learner, which essentially includes the basic skills. Although a statewide test is required, the policy does not specify that students must pass the test in order to graduate. It may be used: (1) to determine eligibility for graduation; (2) as one weighted factor in determining eligibility, or (3) for diagnostic purposes only. The Department of Education supports use of the test for diagnostic purposes, or as one weighted factor, but does not support its use as an exit exam.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

One component of the Comprehensive Competency Based Education Plans — Phase I — addresses the need for basic skills remediation. During the 1979-80 term, schools are to begin planning for a basic skills remediation program. Each district is to establish procedures for identifying students needing special help, placing students in special studies programs, and identifying evaluation techniques to measure student proficiency. No funds have been specifically allocated for remediation programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

The State Board policy requires local districts to establish:

> . . . Appropriate performance objectives and assessment procedures for students who have been identified as having handicaps which prevent them from meeting the adopted Contemporary Life Role performance objectives.

The Department of Education expects local districts to incorporate the life role skill requirement into the Individual Education Plan (IEP) currently developed for each handicapped student. If the competency requirements are incorporated into the IEP, then handicapped students do have an avenue provided toward a high school diploma.

Department officials maintain that all graudation requirements may be satisfied through the IEP. Policies concerning testing of handicapped students must be developed if the statewide basic skills test is adopted as an exit exam.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The State Board policy concerning high school graduation requirements applies only to Georgia's public schools.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

The first statewide tests administered as part of the new graduation requirement will be given in 1981-82. Competency tests were administered in ten pilot districts in 1978-79, although the same test was not used in all dis-

tricts. Results of the pilot testing are available through the Department of Education, but had not been received at the time of this printing.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the test?

The number of times a student may take the state test must be determined by the Board if passage of the test is adopted as a requirement for graduation.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

The Measuring Cup is a publication of Public Information and Resource Services, Inc., which is devoted to exploring testing issues and promoting testing reform. Getting information on the testing program is difficult at this point, says staff member Patricia West. The Department of Education refers to the competency based education program, but denies that there is or will be competency testing as such, according to West.

At present, concerns are focussed more on some local communities which are implementing competency testing programs for grade promotion and high school graduation. In Tattnall County, for example, a student must achieve a minimum score of 9.0 on the California Achievement Test to receive a high school diploma. The requirement is being challenged in federal court by a group of parents who have joined together under the name "Concerned Parents." According to Concerned Parents, students are placed in classrooms based upon test scores. "Once you get put in one of the low groups," claims one parent, "you never get out and each year it gets worse."

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

Beginning in 1979-80, secondary schools in Georgia must begin implementing a competency based education program which includes: Incorporating a "life role" focus into the curriculum; developing "performance objectives" for the life roles of individual, citizen, consumer, and producer; and developing means of assessing students' mastery of the objectives.

The Department of Education is developing a criterion-referenced test in the basic skills (reading, writing, and mathematics) which will be administered to students who enter ninth grade in 1981-82.

In Spring 1980, the State Board will decide whether passage of the test is to become a graduation requirement.

REFERENCE

Competency Based Education Plan — Phase I. Department of Education, 1979.

High School Graduation Requirements. State Board Policy 30-700, Adopted November 1976, Amended December 1978.

An Introduction to Georgia's Competency Based Education Program for Secondary School Improvement. Department of Education, Undated mimeographed paper.

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Kentucky

Does Kentucky have a minimum competency testing program?

Beginning in Spring 1979, nationally standardized tests in reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, language arts, and learning skills are to be administered annually in grades three, five, seven, and ten. Diagnostic tests will be given in the fall to students enrolled in grades four, six, eight, and eleven who did not meet the minimum standards on the basic skills tests the previous spring. There is currently no promotion or graduation sanction connected with the testing program.

Who mandated the program?

The basic skills testing program was initiated by the Kentucky General Assembly in March 1978 by passage of the Educational Improvement Act. Although the current competency testing program was mandated by the legislature, the State Board of Education had previously adopted plans to implement competency based education and testing over a graduated four year period.

In March 1977, the Board approved the development of criterion-referenced tests in reading, writing and mathematics for grades three, five, eight, and eleven. Committees then began working to identify basic minimum competencies from which tests could be developed. However, a Task Force

on Education, which had been appointed by the governor, supported a legislative mandate for testing. The task force recommended that the State Board plan be modified and the timeline for implementation changed. The Educational Improvement Act of 1978 took precedence over the Board's plan and did change the approach and timeline for testing.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

There are two main components of the Educational Improvement Act: Statewide testing of all students in grades three, five, seven, and ten is to be conducted annually beginning in the Spring 1979; and, each district must develop an Educational Improvement Plan to address weaknesses in the current instructional program identified by the testing. Provisions of the law relating to the testing program include the following:

(1) The purpose of the program is to measure and report student progress in the basic skills, which are defined as reading, writing, spelling, language arts, mathematics, and the development of learning skills. The State Board may determine other areas to be tested;
(2) Results are to be compiled on a statewide, district and school basis by the Department of Education, and results of individual students reported to the schools;
(3) Test results are to be used to develop educational improvement plans and are not to be used to evaluate teachers or administrators.

The legislation also lists a number of provisions concerning the Educational Improvement Plan which each district is required to develop. These include:

(1) Public hearings are to be held at each school to involve local citizens in the development of the district's plan;
(2) The first annual plans were to be submitted October 1, 1979 to the Department of Education for review and approval;
(3) Programs to address identified educational weaknesses are to be implemented in grades four, six, eight, and eleven during the 1979-80 school year, and are to continue the following year in grades five, seven, nine, and twelve also. Programs are to be reviewed and updated annually.

The type of information to be included in each district's Educational Improvement Plan is defined by the legislation: product goals (expected student outcomes); process goals (procedures to be followed in meeting product goals); a list of individuals, by occupation, or organizations involved in the plan's development; areas of instructional weakness revealed by district assessment results; a list of priorities for program implementation; objectives and activities for alleviating identified educational weaknesses, and a timeline for implementation. Each year, after the initial plan is submitted, a brief report of progress made in overcoming observed weaknesses must be made.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

Two divisions within the Department of Education are responsible for carrying out the Educational Improvement Act. The Office of Research and Planning administers the testing program. The Bureau of Instruction is responsible for reviewing local districts' Educational Improvement Plans and for providing assistance to districts in developing the plans.

The legislation required the governor to appoint an eighteen-member State Advisory Committee for Educational Improvement which would be "broadly representative of citizens, parents, teachers, and administrators." Of the eighteen committee members, four are women, two are Black, and with the exception of two legislators, all are educators or associated with education-related organizations (e.g., PTA and School Boards Association). The committee meets at least three times a year and reports annually to the governor on the program's implementation.

What is the implementation timetable?

The first statewide tests were administered in April 1979, one year after passage of the Educational Improvement Act. Diagnostic tests were then administered for the first time in September and October, 1979.

The 1979 statewide assessment results were intended to help districts in developing their Educational Improvement Plans. Test results were made available to districts by August 1. On the same date, tentative district plans were to be submitted to the Department of Education's Bureau of Instruction. Final district plans had to be written, reviewed, and approved by the local board, and submitted to the Department of Education by October 1, 1980.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals and objectives?

In 1978, the State Board of Education approved "expected student outcomes." The Board's goals state that "the Kentucky Educational Improvement Act of 1979 will assure . . . that each student in the public schools has the opportunity:

(1) to increase basic reading vocabulary skills;
(2) to improve basic reading comprehension skills;
(3) to improve spelling skills;
(4) to improve knowledge of language mechanics skills;
(5) to improve utilization of effective language expressions skills;
(6) to improve skills in mathematics computation;
(7) to increase knowledge of mathematics concepts and applications; and
(8) to increase the ability to utilize reference skills."

The tests administered annually in the spring measure these general academic skills. As part of their Educational Improvement Plans, districts are required to develop local goals and objectives. Local districts must also

develop methods for measuring students' attainment of these goals and objectives.

What tests are to be used?

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS/S) was selected for the statewide testing program. The CTBS was already widely used and was thus familiar to local districts. The department also had the capacity to immediately score the tests. The composition of the test battery is shown below:

Skill Areas	Test	Number of Items by Grade 3	5	7	10
Reading	Test 1-Reading Vocabulary	40	40	40	40
	Test 2-Reading Comprehension	45	45	45	45
Language	Test 3-Spelling	44	50	30	30
	Test 4-Language Mechanics	20	20	20	20
	Test 5-Language Expression	30	35	35	35
Mathematics	Test 6-Math Computation	48	48	48	48
	Test 7-Math Concepts and App.	50	50	50	50
Reference Skills	Test 8-Reference Skills	20	20	20	20

For the diagnostic tests at grades four, six, and eight, the Department has selected the *Prescriptive Reading Inventory and Diagnostic Mathematics Inventory*, published by CTB/McGraw-Hill. At grade eleven, the *California Achievement Test* will be administered. Local districts have the option of administering the diagnostic tests selected by the Department or developing alternate diagnostic procedures which must be approved by the Department. Test booklets, answer sheets and scoring services will be provided to the districts which elect to use the state-adopted diagnostic tests.

How are test results to be used?

Test results are to be used on a district level to identify changes needed in instructional programs, and in developing Educational Improvement Plans.

Results are also used to identify individual students needing further diagnostic testing and remediation. Decisions about promotion and retention are not based on test results.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

According to a program implementation manual developed by the Department, students who do not achieve mastery levels on the basic skills tests are to be included in "educational improvement activities." However, no funds have been provided for remedial programs. The legislature allocated $400,000 for testing in 1978-79 and $1.75 million for 1979-80. Funds for 1979-80 must cover both basic skills and diagnostic testing, and any remaining money will be used to provide instructional materials for remedial purposes.

The types of remedial programs being developed depend upon the availability of local resources. In various districts, plans are being made to use volunteers, to provide remediation within regular classrooms, and to establish remedial resource rooms.

The relationship between remedial and Title I programs has been questioned by the Student-Parent Aid and Resource Center since many of the same students can be expected to be identified by both programs as needing special services. The issue of whether Title I funds will be used to supplant state funds (which regulations prohibit) is particularly significant when remedial programs are required by the state without additional resources being allocated.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Handicapped students who are enrolled for at least a portion of the day in a regular classroom are to be tested with all other students. Exceptional students receiving services exclusively in self-contained, special education classes are to be administered the CTBS if the special education teacher considers it appropriate. Test results for all exceptional students, including those tested in the regular classroom, are handled separately and remain in the local school district rather than being compiled with other test results on a statewide basis.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The Educational Improvement Act, and resulting statewide testing, apply only to the public schools.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

The Department of Education has established cutoff scores for each subtest of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. The scores are intended to identify students most in need of special assistance. They do not, in the Department's view, indicate a point between competence and non-competence.

The cutoff scores were determined by first examining students' performances on the 1978 CTBS administered by many local districts. Raw scores were selected for each subtest for grades three, five, seven, and ten below which approximately 20 percent of Kentucky students could be expected to score in 1979. These raw scores were then converted to scale scores which became the minimum standards.

Test results are reported on a statewide, district, school, and individual basis. Four types of data are reported — standard scale scores, grade equivalents, national percentiles, and stanines. The percentage of students who fell below the mastery levels on the basic skills tests is shown in Table I. Scores were not reported by racial or socio-economic sub-groups.

KENTUCKY: TABLE 1

Percentage of students falling below mastery levels

Grade	Reading	Language Mechanics	Language Expression	Spelling	Mathematics	Reference Skills
3	15	15	15	19	13	14.5
5	15	14	14	18	14	17
7	14.5	18	18	16	15	16
10	18	17.5	21	19	14	17

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

The CTBS will be administered to students only once. However, additional diagnostic testing will be provided for students who fall below minimum standards on the CTBS.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

Marian Keyes of the Student-Parent Aid and Resource Center in Louisville feels that the testing program in Kentucky is basically a positive attempt to help students. It focusses, she says, on identifying students who need help rather than on making judgements about students. One concern which Keyes expresses about the program is that funds have been provided only for remedial materials, and not for additional staff. Also, the cut-off levels on the CTBS which identify students needing further diagnostic testing and remediation are so low that some students who need help are excluded. Because the diagnostic testing and remediation are locally directed, it is important, in Keyes' view, for parents to become informed about how the program is being implemented and how test results are being used.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

In Spring 1980, educational improvement programs are to begin for grades four, six, eight, and eleven. The following year educational improvement programs are to continue in grades five, seven, nine, and twelve in addition to grades four, six, eight, and eleven.

Basic skills testing (CTBS) is to continue each spring with diagnostic testing each fall.

When asked to speculate on the future during a public meeting, the Chief Deputy Superintendent suggested the possibility that students who did not meet minimum standards might not be promoted and that students completing high school without achieving minimum standards might receive certificates of completion rather than regular diplomas.

REFERENCE

Educational Improvement: Implementation Manual for the Kentucky Educational Improvement Act of 1978. Kentucky Department of Education, 1978.

Overview of the Educational Improvement Program. Undated mimeographed paper.

House Bill No. 579, The Educational Improvement Act of 1978. Enacted March 7, 1978.

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Louisiana

Does Louisiana have a minimum competency testing program?

Louisiana currently conducts an annual statewide assessment in the basic skills (reading, mathematics, and writing) in grades four, eight, and eleven. Tests were first administered in Fall 1977.

Beginning in 1980-81, a new "literacy assessment" program will be initiated, with students in grade two being tested. An additional grade level is to be added each year until grades two through twelve are included in the program. Promotion decisions will be based in part on student performance on the new literacy tests.

Who mandated the program?

Since 1976, the Louisiana legislature has passed three educational accountability acts which created the state's basic skills and literacy assessment programs. Act 709, the 1976 accountability legislation, was amended one year later by Act 621, the Public School Accountability and Assessment Act. The Competency Based Education Act (750), passed in 1979, provides for the continuation of parts of Act 621, but substantially alters the state's student assessment program.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

The first bill, Act 709, called for the establishment of minimum standards in the basic skills and statewide testing of all students completing grades three, seven, and ten.

Act 621, the Public School Accountability and Assessment Act, is essentially the same bill, with an amendment concerning the dissemination of test results. It mandates a broad system of educational evaluation involving students, personnel, and course content. Relative to student assessment, the program is to include the following:

(1) Establishment of educational goals for the state;
(2) Establishment of basic, uniform skills and concepts for each grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics and in other subject areas identified by the state superintendent;
(3) Identification of performance objectives;
(4) Development of evaluation instruments; and
(5) Implementation of an overall evaluation design.

The legislation also required that (1) the state Superintendent of Education prescribe guidelines for reporting students' progress to parents, (2) the tests be criterion-referenced, and (3) descriptions of the instruments be provided to teachers and parents before tests are administered.

In 1979, an even more comprehensive bill, the Competency Based Education Act, was passed. The Act calls for a broad competency based education program which would coordinate all existing state statutes, policies, and guidelines affecting student performance. More specifically, the legislation mandates: (1) The establishment of state curricula and standards for required subjects; (2) the development in each district of pupil progression plans; and (3) the creation of a literacy assessment program. Under present provisions, students are not required to meet specified standards for graduation. The assessment program will affect grade promotion decisions.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

Act 621 directed the superintendent to: (1) Develop guidelines for implementing a comprehensive accountability plan, to be submitted to a Joint Legislative Committee on Education by January 1978; (2) establish minimum performance levels; (3) develop a uniform system of testing; and (4) choose the grade levels to be tested. Each school board must annually evaluate and report on students' progress to the state superintendent who, in turn, is to make an annual statewide report.

The State Department of Education is directed to analyze and report each district's test results in relation to a variety of operational factors (e.g., class size, pupil/teacher ratio) which may have an impact on students' scores.

The Competency Based Education Act (1979) directs the Department of Education to develop: (1) Curriculum guides for subjects required in the elementary and secondary schools; (2) minimum performance standards; and

(3) an assessment program which would measure pupil performance in applying academic skills to "life coping situations."

Local districts are responsible for developing pupil progression plans. A committee, representative of parents in the school district, is to be appointed by each superintendent to participate in developing the pupil progression plan and promotion policies.

What is the implementation timetable?

Field tests were administered in Spring 1977 to a ten percent sample of third, seventh, and tenth graders. The first statewide assessment in reading was administered to all students in grades four, eight, and eleven in the Fall 1977.

In Fall 1978, the second assessment was conducted, and students were tested in both reading and mathematics. Writing was added to the assessment in Fall 1979. The current testing program will continue in grades four, eight, and eleven until the new literacy assessment program is implemented in grade four (1982-1983). Tests will then be administered in grades six, eight, and eleven until those grades are incorporated in the literacy assessment.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

Act 621 directed the Department of Education to develop educational goals, objectives and minimum performance standards in reading, writing, and mathematics as a basis for student assessment. Three committees composed of educators in reading, mathematics and language arts were formed to identify standards in their respective skill areas. Each committee identified skills for grades K through 12, indicating whether the skill was introduced, ongoing, mastered, or maintained at the grade levels for which it was listed.

Field test items were developed prior to the adoption of performance standards. However, items subsequently included in the statewide assessment were selected by the advisory committees based on how well the items matched the identified performance standards.

The Competency Based Education Act of 1979 directs the Department of Education to adopt state curricula and standards for all required subjects by 1981-82.

What tests are to be used?

Math and reading objectives and tests were initially developed by Intran Corporation of Minneapolis in 1976-77. Items field tested in Spring 1977 were then reviewed by the advisory committees before the tests used in the statewide assessment were compiled.

The math and reading tests consist of 80 multiple choice items, with the exception of a 64-item fourth grade reading test. A writing test has been developed by National Testing Service of Durham, North Carolina, and includes both a multiple choice section and a writing sample. Because of the

time and expense involved, only five percent of the writing samples will actually be scored, although samples will be taken from all students.

The assessment program to be developed under the Competency Based Education Act is to measure students' ability to apply academic skills in "life-coping situations."

How are test results to be used?

The stated purpose of the current testing program is to identify students who do not meet minimum standards. Act 621 states that graduation and promotion are not to be dependent on test performance. Testing is also intended to assure that education programs are accountable for meeting defined goals. Demonstrated attainment of education goals is to be considered in accrediting public schools, provided that students' "home environmental factors" are taken into account.

When the literacy assessment program is initiated in 1980-81, local school boards must adopt "pupil progression plans" and policies concerning promotion and retention. In accordance with local plans, teachers will be primarily responsible for determining students' class placements. A student's mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics, as determined by the testing program, is to be considered in making promotion and placement decisions.

Placement decisions may be reviewed by the local board at its own initiation or at the request of the superintendent or a parent or guardian. The Department of Education is in the process of developing guidelines to be followed by local districts in preparing their pupil progression plans.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The Public School Accountability and Assessment Act (Act 621, 1977) does not require remedial programs, although they are being developed by some local systems. The Department of Education is currently studying the effectiveness of summer remediation programs, but there is no systematic monitoring of the types of programs being developed locally.

The Competency Based Education Act (1979) does require that "competency and/or remedial programs," staffed by certified personnel, be provided to students who do not meet required mastery levels. The legislation states that no student who participates in remedial programs shall "in any way be labeled as incompetent."

Remediation is to be provided beginning in 1980-81 and will be developed in conjunction with the literacy assessment program. No state funds have been appropriated to support the development of the required remedial programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

All exceptional students, except those who are multiply handicapped or severely mentally handicapped, are included in the current testing. Braille and large print tests have been developed and modifications in testing procedures

are allowed. While the same minimum performance standards apply to handicapped students, the expected time frame for achieving mastery may vary depending upon the individual student's abilities.

Policies concerning testing of handicapped students in the new literacy assessment program must still be developed. Policies concerning how handicapped students will be affected by districts' pupil progression plans must also be determined.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The Public School Accountability and Assessment Act (1977) and the Competency Based Education Act (1979) and the resulting testing programs apply only to Louisiana's public schools.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

On the first reading assessment in 1977, results were reported at district and state levels, with school results being made available to districts on an optional basis. No data on individual students were reported to the schools. The average percent of items correct for each of the reading domains was reported by ethnic sub-group, and white and Oriental students consistently scored higher than students from other ethnic backgrounds. Black students fell between fifteen and twenty percent below white students on almost all domains at each grade level.

All test scores of individual students and average scores for classrooms, schools and districts are exempt from the public records act. A school board may release test data if individual students, teachers, and classes are not identified. However, test results made public must be accompanied by an analysis of socio-economic factors which may affect student scores.

In 1978, math and reading tests were administered to grades four, eight, and eleven. Scores were reported on a state, district, school, and individual student level. The average percent of items correct for the total student population in mathematics were 77.2 at grade four, 59.4 at grade eight, and 69.6 at grade eleven. In reading, scores were reported on a number of skills. The average percent of items correct for all students tested range from 69 to 87.

A Department of Education report to the legislature notes that white students outperformed all other ethnic groups in reading. White and Oriental students had the highest performance in math, with Black students consistently having the lowest scores on both tests. The Department also reported a study which correlates demographic variables with high test performance. White students from small families whose parents were well educated and employed in professional, managerial, or office positions were found to have the highest test scores.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

As tests are used primarily for diagnostic purposes, and not to determine grade placement or graduation, they are adminstered only one time.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

The Parent-Community Alliance for Quality Education is concerned about several aspects of Louisiana's testing program, according to Valisa Domingue, an Alliance staff member. While the legislature has mandated a broad competency based education program, only $300,000 have been allocated for implementation. The majority of the funds will be used for test development and administration. One fear which the Alliance has, says Domingue, is that the use of test results to make promotion decisions will lead to *de facto* segregation, since minority students generally perform more poorly on tests than white students. The Alliance also feels that more time is needed for development of statewide standards, and incorporation of the standards into the curriculum, before testing is implemented.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

The work of implementing the literacy assessment program will begin in 1979-80. At the state level, objectives must be defined, tests developed, and minimum performance standards determined. Local districts, assisted by representative parents' committees, must develop pupil progression plans, establish promotion policies, and plan for remedial programs.

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Mississippi

Does Mississippi have a minimum competency testing program?

From 1977 to 1979, Mississippi conducted an annual statewide Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) in the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and language arts. Beginning in Spring 1980, a similar five-year assessment program will be initiated. Students in grades four, six, and eight will take both achievement and aptitude tests. The program is intended to provide information to the general public and to educators on state, district, school, and individual student levels of achievement. Test results are not intended to be used as criteria for grade promotion and graduation.

Who mandated the program?

The assessment program and a related accountability program are authorized by the legislature and through subsequent policies adopted by the State Board of Education:

(1) In 1975, the Mississippi legislature passed the Educational Accountability and Assessment Act (HB 35 Chapter 310);
(2) On July 27, 1979, the Commission on School Accreditation established new standards requiring all accredited schools to have a written description of each instructional program and a systematic evaluation plan by November 1, 1984.

(3) In August 1979, a position statement on educational accountability was adopted by the State Board of Education outlining the responsibilities of state and local districts.

A number of minimum competency bills have been considered by the legislature over the past three years, but none have passed both House and Senate. There was particularly strong interest in 1978, when a bill which would have created a competency testing program passed in the Senate. Strong opposition in the House Education Committee kept the proposed legislation off the House floor. At the same time, the House Committee met with representatives of the Department of Education to discuss what measures could be taken to improve educational accountability.

In 1978, the State Commission on School Accreditation, which is appointed by the State Board, proposed a minimum competency program which would have led to the creation of four different high school "termination credentials":

(1) An advanced diploma for students who completed twenty course units and who achieved a composite score of at least grade 12 on a statewide, standardized achievement test;
(2) A general diploma for students who completed 17 units and who achieved a composite score of at least grade 9 on a standardized achievement test;
(3) A basic diploma for student who completed 17 units but who scored below grade nine on a standardized achievement test; and
(4) A certificate in special education for handicapped students.

The Children's Defense Fund studied the likely impact of this proposal and projected that, in districts with high levels of poverty, large minority enrollments, and low levels on a health status scale, one-third to one-half of the students would receive the basic diploma. The proposal to create differentiated diplomas was not adopted by the State Board.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

The Educational Accountability and Assessment Act directs the State Department of Education to:

(1) Regularly examine and update adopted state goals for elementary and secondary education;
(2) Identify goal related performance objectives;
(3) Evaluate the state's and school districts' performance in relation to established goals and objectives;
(4) Annually report on the performance of the state school system; and
(5) Recommend components of local district accountability plans and provide technical assistance to districts in implementing their plans.

Local districts are required to:

(1) Adopt a plan for a local accountability program; and

(2) Periodically report to residents of the district and the State Department on the extent to which the goals and objectives have been achieved.

The legislation specifies that the Department of Education may establish a state advisory commission on educational accountability and that local school boards may appoint citizen advisory accountability committees to make recommendations concerning the respective programs. There is no standing state advisory commission, and a Department of Education official has indicated that few, if any, districts have established local citizen advisory committees.

The standards adopted by the Commission on School Accreditation in July 1979 require the following:

(1) Each school must develop a written Accountability and Instructional Management (AIM) plan. A manual describing the program was to be provided to each school in November 1979 and plans are to be developed over a five year period (1979-1984);
(2) Schools are required:
  (a) to develop instructional objectives, supportive resources and activities,
  (b) to evaluate student progress by developing or selecting tests which measure performance on locally identified objectives, and
  (c) to adopt minimum performance standards;
(3) Each school is to have a written course of study in each area of the curriculum developed by teachers and administrators within the system; and
(4) A progress report must be made annually to residents of the school district and filed with the Commission on School Accreditation.

By January 15, 1980, each school must have submitted an implementation schedule to the Department of Education outlining a proposed order and time frame for completing its AIM plan. Schools which have not developed and implemented AIM plans by 1984-85 that meet Department of Education standards will no longer be accredited.

In August 1979, the Board of Education adopted a position statement on educational accountability which reinforces the legislative mandate. The Board outlined the following responsibilities for educators at the state and local district levels. The Department of Education is responsible for:

(1) Reviewing and approving local instructional programs through the established school accreditation process;
(2) Providing assistance to local schools in developing their AIM plans; and
(3) Conducting the Mississippi Educational Assessment Program.

The primary responsibility for developing, provising, and evaluating instruction lies with local districts which must:

(1) Develop and implement instructional programs which meet general state guidelines;

(2) Design the curriculum to best meet local needs;
(3) Routinely evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and
(4) Provide information to the public about instructional goals, student achievement, and means of improving pupil performance.

What is the implementation timetable?

A five-year, statewide assessment program will be initiated in Spring 1980. This testing follows a three-year assessment program conducted from 1976-1979.

Accreditation standards adopted in July 1979 require districts to (1) develop local instructional objectives, (2) select or develop tests to measure students' mastery of the objectives, and (3) adopt minimum performance standards. These steps are to be carried out over a five-year period from 1979-84. Schools must submit an implementation schedule to the Department of Education by January 15, 1980.

How do the tests relate to state competency goals or objectives?

Nationally standardized achievement and aptitude tests are used for the statewide assessment and thus do not specifically relate to Mississippi goals and objectives.

Tests to be locally administered, as required by the AIM program, are to measure students' performance on the objectives developed by each school.

What tests are to be used?

Two tests were used for the Mississippi Educational Assessment Program from 1976 to 1979: *The California Achievement Test* (CAT), (1970 Edition), and the *Short Form Test of Academic Aptitude* (SFTAA). The skills tested by the CAT included reading vocabulary and comprehension, language mechanics and usage, spelling, and mathematics computation and concepts. The aptitude test measured attributes such as reasoning ability, memory, attention to detail, and the ability to comprehend relationships, patterns and sequences. The Department of Education will select new achievement and aptitude tests for the assessment program beginning in Spring 1980.

How are test results to be used?

The purpose of the MEAP is to provide educators and the public with information about student, school, and district performance. Department of Education officials have stated, however, that assessment results would be misused if used to evaluate particular schools, teachers, or programs. Results are not intended to be used to determine class placement.

Local districts will determine how results of tests which are to be developed and administered at each school as part of the AIM program are to be used.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The legislation which created the state accountability and assessment program makes no provision for remediation and no state funds have been appropriated for that purpose. The State Board policy on education accountability, adopted in August 1979, holds local educators responsible for "providing instruction which will benefit all students in the community."

The AIM program requires schools to take actions to improve instruction in areas where students do not meet locally adopted minimum standards.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Handicapped students served exclusively in special programs are not included in the statewide assessment. Local schools have the option to include or exclude students mainstreamed in a regular classroom. Tests of handicapped students are scored locally and are not reported with school and district results.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The statewide assessment program is conducted only in the public schools. All *accredited* schools, both public and private, must submit AIM plans to the Department of Education.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

In 1976-77, tests were administered in grades four, five, and eight. Testing in 1977-78 included grades four through nine, and in 1978-79, tests were administered in grades four, five, six, and eight. Test booklets and scoring services were available to local districts which chose to administer the tests in grades seven and nine.

Derived scale scores, which are three-digit numbers from 100 to 900, are reported for each of seven subtests on the CAT. In addition to the scores actually obtained on the CAT, an anticipated achievement level, based on performance on the SFTAA, is also reported.

The aptitude test scores are converted to the scaled scores used for the achievement tests so that CAT and SFTAA results can be compared. For example, at grade four in 1978, the statewide mean score on the CAT in reading vocabulary was 392. The anticipated score, based on the SFTAA, was 390. The difference in scores was not considered significant. (Table 1 shows the statewide mean achievement on the CAT and the anticipated achievement level for all students tested in 1977 and 1978.)

Percentile scores, which indicate how Mississippi students compared with the national norms in 1977 and 1978, are shown in Table 2. Statewide, students at each grade level fell below the national average (50 percent) on all subtests. Performance did improve on some subtests between 1977 and 1978. Performances varied widely from district to district.

A study correlating districts' percentile scores with the number of poor students demonstrates that, in districts scoring below the thirtieth percentile,

MISSISSIPPI: TABLE 1

Mississippi Educational Assessment Program

Statewide Mean Achievement and Anticipated Achievement 1977 and 1978

		Read Voc	Read Compre.	Math Comp.	Math Conc.	Lang. Mech.	Lang. Usage	Spell
Gr.	1978							
4	Obt. Sc.*	392	418	369	383	424	430	414
	Ant. Sc.**	390	419	362	385	409	428	411
	1977							
	Obt. Sc.	384	412	361	378	414	426	407
	Ant. Sc.	389	417	361	384	407	426	409
Gr.	1978							
5	Obt. Sc.	415	441	405	408	456	451	439
	Ant. Sc.	420	446	404	414	438	453	445
	1977							
	Obt. Sc.	406	436	395	403	442	444	434
	Ant. Sc.	414	441	401	409	432	449	440
Gr.	1978							
6	Obt. Sc.	439	468	439	436	484	474	467
	Ant. Sc.	451	473	450	443	470	484	472
Gr.	1978							
7	Obt. Sc.	450	475	458	450	493	499	476
	Ant. Sc.	457	475	464	456	484	495	480
Gr.	1978							
8	Obt. Sc.	480	504	497	490	529	525	506
	Ant. Sc.	488	499	497	491	502	515	506
	1977							
	Obt. Sc.	477	501	492	486	525	523	504
	Ant. Sc.	488	499	497	491	502	515	506
Gr.	1978							
9	Obt. Sc.	513	532	530	525	569	554	535
	Ant. Sc.	532	536	544	538	538	546	543

* Obt. Sc. = Obtained score on California Achievement Test

** Ant. Sc. = Anticipated score based on performance on Short Form Test of Academic Aptitude

MISSISSIPPI: TABLE 2

Mississippi Educational Assessment Program

Subtest Scores in Percentiles

1977 and 1978

Grade	Year	Reading		Math		Language		
		Vocab.	Compr.	Compu.	Conc.	Mech.	Usage	Spell.
4	1978	42	40	43	37	51	44	38
	1977	38	40	43	37	45	44	42
5	1978	33	34	32	27	42	37	32
	1977	30	34	32	27	42	37	32
6	1978	30	33	29	27	42	32	32
7	1978	28	33	33	30	35	36	36
8	1978	25	34	33	30	35	38	33
	1977	23	34	33	30	33	38	33
9	1978	21	31	29	27	36	41	29

approximately 50 percent of the students were from poor families. In contrast, in districts scoring above the ninetieth percentile, approximately 18 percent of the students were from poor families.

Local districts are required to report annually to the public on student progress. In reporting its Spring 1979 test results, the Jackson School District indicated whether students were at, above, or below anticipated levels for each grade tested. The district did not, however, give any information about what the anticipated level of performance actually was.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

Only one administration of the statewide achievement and aptitude tests is given annually. Local districts will have the option of readministering tests developed or selected by each school for the AIM program.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

Rims Barber of the Children's Defense Fund in Jackson, Mississippi, has opposed competency bills in the legislature over the past few years, primarily because of the potential impact on minority and low income students. The current statewide assessment program and AIM program have developed without much public scrutiny or involvement, says Barber. "Some mechanisms are needed to involve local participation and to make programs accountable." This is particularly important, Barber says, as districts begin to develop performance objectives and standards and administer tests locally.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

A new assessment program will be initiated in Spring 1980, for which the Department of Education must select achievement and aptitude tests.

Individual schools began developing Accountability and Instructional Management Plans in Fall 1979. By 1984, schools must have implemented AIM plans to become or remain state accredited.

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North Carolina

Does North Carolina have a minimum competency testing program?

Two separate statewide testing programs are conducted in North Carolina. A competency testing program requires students graduating from high school in 1980 and thereafter to pass a functional math and reading test in order to receive a regular diploma. In addition, an "annual testing" program is administered in grades one, two, three, six, and nine. Criterion-referenced tests are given in grades one and two, standardized achievement tests in grades three, six, and nine.

Who authorized the programs?

In June 1977, the N. C. General Assembly passed two bills which mandated the testing programs. HB 205 is entitled "An Act Providing for Annual Testing in the Public Schools in Order to Assess the Effectiveness of the Educational Process." HB 204 is "An Act Providing for the Adoption and Use of Tests to Assure that High School Graduates Possess Skills and Knowledge Necessary to Function in Society." The Competency Testing bill (HB 204) was passed unanimously in the Senate and opposed only by three Black members of the House.

What are the main provisions of the legislation?

The annual testing bill (HB 205) specifies that:

(1) The first statewide testing was to be conducted during the 1977-78 school year;
(2) Tests should focus on the basic subjects;
(3) Tests used in grades one and two should be criterion-referenced; and
(4) Norm-referenced tests should be used in grades three, six, and nine.

The competency testing legislation (HB 204) specifies that:

(1) A field study was to be conducted in Spring 1978;
(2) Competency tests, as a requirement for high school graduation are to be administered annually to all eleventh grade students beginning in the Fall 1978;
(3) Students who initially fail will have additional opportunities to take the tests; and
(4) Remediation is to be provided for all students who do not meet the minimum standards established for the tests.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the programs?

The legislation directed the governor to appoint an eleven-member Annual Test Commission and a fifteen-member Competency Test Commission to plan the respective testing programs. Both Commissions make recommendations to the State Board of Education which actually makes final policy decisions.

All members of the Annual Test Commission are professionals and educators, as specified by the legislation. No provision was made for representation by parent or citizen groups. Although the Competency Test Commission was to include "five citizens interested in education," it includes only one person, a local school board member, who is not employed by the State's higher or public education systems.

The programs are administered through the Department of Public Instruction's Division of Research.

What is the implementation timetable?

The first testing in the "annual" program took place in Spring 1978, and testing is to occur each spring. Competency tests were administered on a field test basis in March 1978. The first statewide adminstration in which individual results were reported was conducted in November 1978. In March 1979, the tests were readministered to students who had failed in November. Competency tests are to be regularly administered twice a year, in the fall and spring, with an additional administration in the last month of school for seniors who have not yet passed.

Three school years intervene between the passage of the competency testing legislation and the graduation of the first class affected by its

requirements. Students who entered the tenth grade in 1977 learned that they would be the first class to meet the new graduation requirement.

How do tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

HB 204 specified that the competency tests were to assure that graduates "possess those skills and that knowledge necessary to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibilities of citizenship." The Competency Test Commission decided to limit the initial testing to functional math and reading skills, with the option of adding other content areas later.

At that time, the state had no specified minimum competency goals or objectives which could be used in selecting or developing a competency test. To develop a set of objectives, the Commission asked all local school districts to rate an extensive list of possible math and reading objectives. District responses were then compiled and synthesized. Ten objectives in reading and eleven objectives in mathematics were identified.

The Commission, with the help of a group of math and reading teachers, then compared a number of competency tests with the identified objectives. The tests selected following the field study were somewhat modified to better reflect the North Carolina objectives.

What tests are used?

For first and second grade testing, the criterion-referenced Diagnostic Mathematics Inventory (DMI) and the Prescriptive Reading Inventory (PRI) were chosen. The norm-referenced California Achievement Tests (CAT) are used in grades three, six, and nine. Funds have also been provided for additional testing of first and second grade students for whom the DMI and PRI provide no meaningful, diagnostic information.

For the competency testing field study conducted in March 1978, a set of either three math or three reading tests was administered to each of approximately 80,000 eleventh graders. Students also took either the math or reading portion of the ninth grade CAT for comparative purposes. All of the competency tests measured functional math and reading skills; i.e., the ability to apply basic academic skills to everyday problems and situations.

From among the instruments used in the field study, the Test of Proficiency in Computation Skills (TOPICS) and the Senior High Assessment of Reading Progress (SHARP), with a number of modifications were chosen for the Fall 1978 administration. All of the tests used in the annual and competency programs in 1978-79 were published by California Test Bureau/McGraw-Hill.

Scholastic Testing Service was awarded a contract to develop two additional forms of the math and reading tests equivalent to the SHARP and TOPICS. These forms were field tested in Spring 1979 and administered statewide in Fall 1979.

The issues of validity and bias have been raised particularly concerning the high school competency tests. The tests may, opponents argue, lack curricular

validity; i.e., they may measure skills, such as filling out a check and completing a tax form, that students have never been taught. While the tests were somewhat modified for use in North Carolina, the majority of items were developed by and for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Another major concern is that the tests may contain items that are not equally familiar to students from all cultural backgrounds. A Cultural Bias Committee was appointed by the Competency Test Commission to identify items that were potentially biased.

Statistical analysis of the field trial results revealed items on which the difference in performance of Black and white students was particularly large. Many of the items identified by the Committee or through statistical analysis were changed or replaced. The statistical work was directed by a Technical Advisory Committee which worked with the Commission on a variety of sampling, measurement and data analysis issues.

How are test results to be used?

The stated purpose of the annual testing program is to assess the effectiveness of the educational process and to help local school systems and teachers identify students' needs in the basic skills. Although not a stated intent of the testing program, some districts are also beginning to make placement and promotion decisions about individual students, based on test results.

In Whiteville, N. C., students who fell below the 25th percentile on the CAT were retained during the 1978-79 school year. While the minority enrollment in that district is approximately 35%, over 50% of the students retained were Black. Students who have been retained are frequently assigned to "partial grades" — a special class placement in which the basic skills are emphasized.

In Charlotte, N. C., the state's largest school system, third, sixth, and ninth graders who fall below the 25th percentile on the CAT in Spring 1980 will be retained the following school year.

If a teacher feels that the test results do not accurately reflect a student's ability, the student may be retested with an alternate form of the CAT. Free summer school programs will be available for all students who are to be retained. The CAT will be administered at the end of summer school and students who achieve above the 25th percentile may be promoted.

HB 204 established passage of competency testing as a graduation requirement beginning in 1980. Students who complete the required number of courses but who do not pass the competency test, will receive certificates of attendance rather than regular diplomas. Transcripts listing courses, grades earned, and attendance will accompany both diplomas and certificates. Participation in special programs and other information as determined by the local school board may also be indicated on the transcript.

According to the legislation, the competency testing program is also intended to identify strengths and weaknesses in the education process and to make the education system accountable for results.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The competency testing bill mandates that remedial instruction be provided to all students who do not meet the minimum standards. In Fall 1978, the General Assembly appropriated 4.45 million dollars for remedial programs. An additional $3.3 million was allocated for the Spring 1979 semester. Funds have been appropriated for the 1979-80 and 1980-81 school years — $11.5 million for the first year, and $8.15 million for the second year. The money is allocated to districts on the basis of individual students' scores, using a weighted formula. More funds are allocated for students with the lowest performance.

Each local school district is responsible for developing a remedial program. Most districts are following one of three basic strategies: (1) Small, remedial classes which focus on developing the skills measured by the competency tests; (2) work in diagnostic, prescriptive laboratories; and (3) individual tutoring programs staffed by a variety of professional and non-professional staff.

Both commercially and locally developed instructional materials are being used and a majority of school systems have purchased one or more instructional kits developed by McGraw-Hill to accompany the SHARP and TOPICS tests.

After one semester of remediation, slightly more than 50 percent of the students statewide passed the competency tests on their second attempt. Approximately 45% of the small number of students (920) who were not in remedial programs were retested in Spring 1979 and also passed on their second attempt.

In a report on the remedial programs conducted during the 1978-79 school year, the Department of Public Instruction maintains that the programs, in general, have been effective and have demonstrated that high school students can learn basic skills with adequate instruction and resources. Community involvement in the schools increased, with approximately 2,300 volunteers working in remedial programs.

The report also outlined a number of problems that occurred. These included difficulties in scheduling, poor attendance, inadequate and depressing classroom space, assignment of new and inexperienced teachers to remedial programs, lack of plans for exceptional students, and exclusive attention to drillwork in some programs.

The report also noted that instances of improper test administration had been observed. Although guidelines state that students are to be allowed as much time as needed to complete the tests, in some cases time limits were imposed. In each of the eight educational regions in North Carolina, a Department of Education consultant has been assigned to monitor and provide assistance in the development of remediation programs. Each consultant is responsible for an average of eighteen local districts.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Guidelines established for the annual testing program allow handicapped

students to be exempted upon the recommendation of the School Based Committee. Such a committee in each school is responsible for deciding the most appropriate placement for special students.

Generally, handicapped students who are mainstreamed into regular classes for at least 50 percent of instructional time are to be included in testing. Teachers have some discretion in choosing the grade level of the test administered. Some modifications in testing procedures are also allowed.

On the 1978-79 tests, a group including all third graders with handicapping conditions scored an average at the 11th percentile average and educable mentally handicapped (EMH) students were at the fourth percentile. In grade six, the average percentile rank for all handicapped students was six, for EMH students, three. In the ninth grade, handicapped students ranked at the fifth percentile, EMH students at the third percentile.

The following guidelines were adopted by the State Board concerning competency testing of handicapped students:

(1) All exceptional students, excluding trainable mentally handicapped and severely handicapped students, are to be tested;
(2) Special test adaptations and modifications in test administration procedures are allowed; and
(3) Parents who wish their children exempted from testing may petition the local school board. Students who are exempted would automatically receive certificates rather than regular diplomas.

Prior to the Fall 1978 testing, the Division of Exceptional Children requested a year's delay in implementing the competency program for handicapped students. Time was needed, they felt, to develop and field test appropriate test adaptations. The Competency Test Commission decided that the legislation would not allow such a delay.

The test modifications which have thus far been developed are Braille and large print editions and a cassette on which test directions and questions, but not response choices, are recorded. Handicapped students may be tested individually, in small groups, and in shorter time periods than non-handicapped students. The Division of Exceptional Children is now working on revising the cassette recording, which was found to be awkward and difficult to use when the tests were administered.

The percentage of handicapped students in the class of 1980 who have not passed the competency test following three administrations is shown in Table 1.

The inclusion of handicapped students, particularly EMH students, has aroused varied reactions. The Competency Test Commission's view, which is supported by the N. C. Association of Retarded Citizens, is that exceptional students should not categorically be denied the opportunity to take the tests. Even though the failure rates for handicapped students are high, the Commission argues that some have passed and that others can be expected to pass with remedial help. It is further maintained that the competency test results may demonstrate to schools that some students have been inap-

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 1

Competency Test Results
Percentage of Handicapped Students
Who Have Failed the Math and Reading Tests
(Combined November 1978 and 1979 Results)

	% Failing Mathematics	% Failing Reading
Educable Mentally Handicapped	66	58
Multiple Handicapped	49	35
Hearing Impaired	4	6
Visually Impaired	4	2
Learning Disabled	23	17

propriately classified as handicapped, and that many students who are handicapped do have the ability to master basic skills.

The governor's office reports having received a number of statements, largely from school systems, which express opposition to testing EMH students. Some concern may arise from the fact that a district's overall scores, which are publicly reported, are lowered when EMH students are included.

Some educators who oppose competency testing maintain that the tests may actually measure sensory deficits rather than true abilities, particularly in the case of learning disabled students. And some parents have raised questions about the fairness of requiring handicapped students to meet the same standards as non-handicapped students. They also question the fairness of denying diplomas to students who have successfully completed their prescribed course of study, although it may be different from the standard course.

Are tests administered in the private schools?

The 1977 legislation which mandated the two testing programs left the decision on testing in private schools to the State Board of Education. The Board subsequently adopted the policy that non-public schools should be required to administer the annual and competency tests.

In May 1979, the N. C. General Assembly passed two bills (SB 526 and SB 385) which removed virtually all state involvement in non-public and church related schools. In terms of testing, the bills require that schools select and administer unspecified tests to students in grades one, two, three, six, nine, and eleven. Each school is to establish minimum standards on the eleventh grade test which students must attain in order to graduate.

Supporters of the legislation maintain that it provides for an appropriate relationship between the church and state. The state, they argue, has no compelling interest which would allow it to dictate tests to be used in non-public schools. The legislation's opponents maintain that the state does have a lawful interest in monitoring the educational progress of all children.

One of the strongest opponents of the legislation is Frank Yeager, a school superintendent and former chairperson of the Annual Test Commission. Yeager declined reappointment to the Commission in July 1979. In his view, requiring public school students to meet standards not uniformly applied to all students in the state may constitute a violation of the right to equal protection. Public schooling, he argues, is the only choice available for the vast majority of low income, minority, and handicapped students — those most affected by competency testing. Two professional educators' associations and a local school board have met with Yeager to discuss taking legal action against the State. An attorney has been hired to explore the issue further.

How have students performed on the tests?

In the annual testing program using standardized achievement tests, North Carolina students fell slightly below the national norm in 1978 and at or slightly above the norm in 1979.

A strong relationship was found between students' socio-economic status and test performance. Minority students performed more poorly than their white classmates, and the performance of handicapped students was especially low. These patterns begin early and become more marked at each higher grade level. The respective grade equivalents for Black and white students, and for students whose family incomes fell below $5,000, from $5,000 to $15,000, and above $15,000 are shown in Table 2.

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 2

1978 Annual Test Results

Grade Equivalents on the California Achievement Tests

	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 9
Black Students	3.1	4.8	7.3
White Students	3.7	6.9	10.0
Income <5,000	2.9	4.8	6.9
5,000-15,000	3.5	6.3	8.8
>15,000	4.4	8.0	11.6

For the competency test field study conducted in March 1978, no individual scores were reported and no cutoff scores established. Statewide results were reported, however, at several possible cutoff scores — 60, 65, 70, and 75. The percentage of students who would have failed the math test at a 65% cutoff point, and who would have failed the reading test at a 70 percent cutoff are shown in Table 3. (These points are shown because they are close to the cutoff scores later chosen.)

Performance on the reading test was considerably higher than on the math test for all students, but the disparity among sub-groups remained great on both tests.

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 3

Competency Test Results
March 1978 Field Study

Percentage of Students Falling Below 70% in Reading and 65% in Mathematics

	Reading <70% of Items Correct	Mathematics <65% of Items Correct
Black Students	40	70
White Students	9	29
Income <5,000	49	80
5,000-15,000	18	47
>15,000	5	20

Passing standards, which were recommended by the Competency Test Commission, were adopted by the State Board of Education in October 1978. The cutoff scores chosen are 72% (87 of 120 items) in reading and 64% (77 of 120 items) in math. Different scores were established because the math test was judged to be more difficult than the reading test.

The first test administration for which individual results were reported to the schools took place in November 1978. While the failure rates for minority students and those whose parents had little education remained high, the failure rates predicted by the field trial did not occur. The percentage of students by race and parent education level who failed the November testing are shown in Table 4. Results by family income were not reported for this administration.

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 4

Competency Test Results
November 1978

Percentage of Students Failing Reading and Math

	Reading % Failing	Mathematics % Failing
Black Students	24	34
White Students	4	7
Parent Ed. <8th Gr.	32	40
8th-11th Grade	17	24
High School Grad.	7	12
>High School Ed.	2	4

The Competency Test Commission attributed the improved performance to increased student motivation, the schools' efforts to prepare students for the tests, and the replacement of some ambiguous questions with clearer items. Others, including Clause Sitton, the editor of *The Raleigh News and Observer*, maintained that the tests had simply been made easier, and that the items which had been changed were not necessarily unclear but were among the more difficult.

Average scores on the questions that were not changed between the field trial and November testing increased 4.16 percent in reading and 5.82 percent in math. Average scores were 9.2 percent higher on the new reading questions and 19.27 percent higher on the new math questions when compared with the items which had been replaced.

The tests were administered again in May 1979. Students were required to retake only the section(s) failed in November. Approximately 17 percent of the students who failed in November did not participate in the retesting. The percentage of students who failed the competency test for a second time is shown in Table 5.

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 5

Competency Test Results
May 1979

Percentage of Students Failing Math and Reading on Retesting

	Reading % Failing	Mathematics % Failing
Black Students	51.5	52
White Students	41	38
Parent Ed. <8th Gr.	61	60
8th-11th Grade	49	49
High School Grad.	40	41.5
>High School Ed.	37.5	35

Following two administrations of the competency tests, 3.3 percent of the white students and 20 percent of the Black students completing their junior year in Spring 1979 had not passed the math test. In reading, two percent of the white students and 15 percent of the Black students had not passed.

In October 1979, all juniors and those seniors who had previously failed were tested. Table 6 shows the results for juniors being tested for the first time.

N. CAROLINA: TABLE 6

Competency Test Results
Ocotober 1979

Percentage of Juniors Failing Math and Reading

	% Failing Math	% Failing Reading
All students-78,500	11	8
Black students-22,750	27	21
White students-56,600	5	3
Parent Ed. <8th Grade	33	30
8th-11th Grade	21	16
High School Grad.	9	6
>High School Grad.	4	2

Following the October 1979 testing, 3,092 seniors (3.8%) had not passed the math test and 2,204 seniors (2.7%) had not passed the reading test. Forty-three and four-tenths percent of the students failing in math are classified as handicapped. Of the seniors failing reading, 53.3. percent are handicapped. Seventy-six percent of the 3,092 seniors failing math are Black. Of the 2,204 seniors who have not passed the reading test, 73 percent are Black.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the test?

Students have a total of five opportunities to take the competency tests during their junior and senior years. Also, students who leave school without a regular diploma may return to take the competency test until they reach 21 years of age.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

Public reaction to the competency testing program, as reflected in a UNC School of Journalism survey conducted in Spring 1979, has been generally positive. Eighty-three percent of those interviewed expressed support for the program with no differences found in the opinions of Black and white respondents.

But the program has also met with strong opposition, particularly from some members of the Black community, who question the motives for testing and fear its consequences for Black students.

While the competency testing bill was under consideration in the legislature, a Task Force on Competency Testing of the North Carolina Democratic Black Leadership Caucus presented a specific list of recommendations to the Education Committee. The following recommendations were supported by a number of Black professional, social, and political organizations:

(1) Criterion-referenced tests, as opposed to normative-based testing should be used as the assessment procedure;
(2) Testing should be used for diagnostic purposes resulting in prescriptive instructional programs;
(3) A local review board, composed of 25 percent minority representatives and both non-professional and professional people representative of all socio-economic levels, should be appointed. This Board should be given the authority to review, disapprove, or suspend recommendations for testing;
(4) The results of examinations should not be used as the sole determinant of whether or not a person receives a certificate or diploma;
(5) The Statewide Competency Test Commission should be composed of at least a 25 percent racial minority, with those members being appointed following criteria set up by the Democratic Black Caucus;
(6) Any legislation designed to assure that high school graduates possess skills and knowledge necessary to function in society should be based on instructional programs, not normative based testing.

The first recommendation was accommodated by the legislation; the remaining five were not.

Opposition to the competency test was most vocal following the field study. Results suggested that as many as 70 percent of the Black students in North Carolina might fail at least one portion of the test. The North Carolina Coalition for Quality Education was formed to try to organize community opposition to the program, and a number of meetings and demonstrations against the tests were held.

A suit supported by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was filed in October 1978 charging that the competency testing program violates rights guaranteed by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. That suit was dismissed because the student in whose name it was filed was classified as a tenth grader in Fall 1978 and thus did not take the competency test in November.

Two organizations representing North Carolina's Christian academies also filed suit charging that the competency test contained questions which violated fundamental values held by those schools. A question cited in the suit as an example required students to add the number of rock concert tickets sold in the morning and afternoon each day to determine on which day sales had been "best." The Christian school organizations maintained that, for their students, the correct answer would be the day on which the ticket sales were least, which would be scored as an incorrect answer. No further court action has taken place since the passage of legislation exempting private schools from state testing.

Rev. Leon White, the Director of the N. C.-Virginia Commission on Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, has expressed opposition to the high school competency test which he views as being detrimental to minority students. The program, according to White, was politically inspired and does not provide a good mechanism for improving the quality of education. A primary concern of White's is that the program takes education out of the hands of local educators and parents and greatly increases the state's involvement and control.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

The annual testing program is expected to continue as currently planned, at least through 1979-80. The Annual Test Commission is considering making some changes in the testing program in grades one and two. Some educators maintain that it does not presently provide adequate diagnostic information on all first and second grade students. A major, unresolved question concerning annual testing is the extent to which local districts will begin to make placement and promotion decisions based on test results.

In the competency testing program, plans are being made to conduct a field test in writing in 1980-81. A statewide test of writing skills may then be added. Unless the program is altered by a legal challenge, the first class affected by the competency test requirement will graduate in Spring 1980.

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South Carolina

Does South Carolina have a minimum competency testing program?

Beginning in 1979-80, a Basic Skills Assessment Program will be initiated and phased in over a period of several years. A readiness test will be administered to entering first graders; criterion-referenced tests will be administered to students in grades one, two, three, six, and eight, and students completing eleventh grade must take a test measuring "adult functional competency." Passage of the eleventh grade test is not required for graduation.

Who mandated the program?

In July 1978, the South Carolina General Assembly passed Act 631, the Basic Skills Assessment Act, which created the testing program. Minimum competency testing was first considered in 1976 by a 26-member State Department of Education task force evaluating South Carolina's high school program. The task force recommended that the State Board of Education award high school diplomas only to students "who have demonstrated through tests of competency that they can read and compute at least at the seventh grade level."

The recommendation was referred to the Board's Curriculum and Instructional Materials Committee for study. A year later, in June 1977, the committee presented a draft proposal for a "Proficiency and Review

Program" which called for readiness testing in grade one, proficiency testing in grades three, six, and eight, and minimum competency testing in grades nine through twelve. According to the proposal, students who did not achieve the minimum standards on the high school competency test would receive certificates of attendance rather than regular diplomas. By 1977, however, attention was largely focused on the state legislature, which had become deeply involved in the minimum competency testing issue.

In January 1977, two Black representatives introduced legislation requiring students to pass tests to be eligible for grade promotion. In March 1977, a bill was introduced in the Senate calling for reading and math tests in grades three and seven. Neither bill was passed, but, at the prodding of the Lieutenant Governor, a nineteen-member Special Joint Education Committee to Study Minimal Competency in Basic Skills was created to "conduct a study on matters relating to minimum competency in the basic skills and report its findings to the General Assembly." The committee was composed of ten legislators, nine persons representing educators and other citizens, and three ex-officio members.

Also in 1977, an Education Finance Act was passed in which the State Department of Education was directed to "develop or select and field test a competency based student assessment program in the basic skill areas of reading and mathematics utilizing criterion-referenced tests."

Competency testing was a major issue in the 1978 legislative session, as a basic skills assessment program proposed by the Special Joint Education Committee was heatedly debated over a six-month period. The most controversial aspect of the legislative proposal was its requirement that satisfactory performance on a functional literacy test be a condition for receiving a high school diploma, beginning in 1985-86.

The bill passed in the House with the graduation requirement included, although not without strong opposition from some members of the Black Caucus. (Two members of the Caucus supported the bill, nine opposed it.) The bill was amended in the House to delay the graudation requirement until 1989-90. To insure passage of the bill in the Senate, sponsors agreed to drop the exit test provision.

What are the main provisions of the legislation?

Act 631 provides for the establishment of a basic skills assessment program to include:

(1) A readiness test administered at the beginning of the school year in grade one;
(2) Development and administration of criterion-referenced tests in reading and math for grades one, two, and three, and in reading, math, and writing for grades six and eight; and
(3) Selection or development of a test to measure "adult functional competency" at the end of grade eleven.

The act also calls for the establishment of educational objectives in the basic

skills (reading, writing, and math), with minimum standards of student achievement, for kindergarten through grade twelve.

The act does not specifically require students to perform at certain levels to be eligible for grade promotion or for high school graduation. It does, however, require the Board of Education to "determine the high school credentials to be awarded students not meeting the minimum achievement scores," beginning in 1989. This determination is to depend upon "baseline data" collected during eleventh grade testing from 1981-82 to 1988-89.

According to the act, funds to carry out the program are to be provided by the state through the Education Finance Act of 1977. Thus far, funds for test development and initial implementation of assessment program have been included in the annual general appropriations act. The phase-in of the assessment program is thus subject to yearly legislative review and funding. The actual cost of the program, a widely debated issue while the bill was in the legislature, has been estimated at six million dollars by some, $60 million by others.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

Act 631 called for the creation of a fifteen-member Basic Skills Advisory Commission. Six educators were appointed by the State Superintendent, seven lay persons "actively involved in public education issues" were appointed by the governor, and the respective chairpersons of the Senate Education Committee and House Education and Public Works Committee (or their designees) serve as ex-officio members. The legislation provided that racial balance in appointments to the Advisory Commission was to be insured. Five of the original fifteen commission members are Black.

In July 1979, the Commission was expanded to 27 members. The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate each appoint six members, who may be members of the General Assembly or interested citizens.

According to the legislation, the Basic Skills Advisory Commission is to make recommendations to the Governor, State Board, and General Assembly concerning all aspects of program implementation.

The real authority to plan and administer the statewide program is vested in the State Board and State Department of Education. The State Board of Education, through the Department of Education, is directed to:

(1) Establish statewide educational objectives in the basic skills, with minimum standards of student achievement;
(2) Establish the state's basic skills assessment program, including test selection or development, field testing, and administration;
(3) Insure that cultural bias is eliminated from the tests;
(4) Train state and local staff and teachers to administer the tests and to interpret test results;
(5) "Render advice and aid" to local school districts concerning their curriculum and the assessment program;

(6) Monitor and evaluate the curriculum and instructional methods in each school in the state to insure compliance with the act's standards;
(7) Initiate and field test, in at least five representative school districts, basic instructional programs in reading, writing, and mathematics designed to raise student performance to statewide standards. This is to be done by 1980-81.

The provisions of the Basic Skills Assessment Act direct local school districts to:

(1) Participate in the program mandated by the act;
(2) Use the test results to aid in diagnosing students' basic skills deficiencies;
(3) Provide students with the "basic instruction" necessary to aid them in bringing their performance up to statewide minimum standards for a particular grade when test results indicate students are not performing at the required level;
(4) Adopt policies to insure students are continuously assessed to determine their individual progress in relation to statewide standards, grades K-12; and
(5) Provide appropriate in-service training to all teachers and administrators responsible for implementing the assessment program "to insure efficient and effective methods of instruction."

While these mandates express the General Assembly's intention that local school districts should take the actions necessary to make the Basic Skills Assessment Program effective, the legislation contains no provisions to ensure enforcement of these requirements. Similarly, there are no mandated sanctions in the event local districts are found not to be complying with the provisions of the act.

The legislation extends to parents a number of informational and consultation rights in an effort to insure that parents (and guardians) will be aware of the standing of their children in relation to the basic skills objectives established by the state. The legislation requires that schools must:

(1) Notify parents in writing when their children demonstrate by their performance on any of the state-mandated tests that they cannot meet the required standards; this notice must be placed in the school records of the child concerned;
(2) Provide parents with written test results information if it is requested by the parents;
(3) Provide parents with explanations of the child's basic skill deficiencies, as revealed by the child's performance on the test; and
(4) Provide parents with suggestions for how they can assist the child to help him/her overcome the deficiencies identified by the test.

What is the implementation timetable?

The time line for test administration, as specified in the act, is as follows:

1979-80 - Readiness testing for entering first graders;

1980-81 - Readiness testing and basic skills testing in grades one, two, three, six, and eight;

1981-82 - Readiness testing, testing in grades one, two, three, six, eight, and competency testing in grade eleven.

Current plans call for field testing the criterion-referenced tests for grades one, two, three, six, and eight in 1979-80. The eleventh grade test is to be field tested in 1980-81.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

A list of kindergarten objectives was initially compiled by a committee of educators, early childhood specialists, and Department of Education staff. The list was submitted to all school districts and to a sample of kindergarten and first grade teachers for review, and then revised and resubmitted for a second review. Simultaneous with the second review by educators, the objectives were published in four newspapers for public review and comment. The objectives were again revised and submitted to the Basic Skills Advisory Commission for review. Eighteen objectives, each of which is followed by an explanation and suggested subskills or activities for helping the student attain mastery, were approved by the State Board in June 1979.

Objectives for grades one through twelve were assembled by the Instructional Objectives Exchange of Los Angeles, California. Prior to their adoption by the State Board in July 1979, the objectives were reviewed by committees of curriculum specialists and by approximately 18,000 teachers. In addition, eight regional public meetings were held to provide other citizens with an opportunity to comment on the objectives.

Six objectives in reading, six in writing, and five in math were identified for each grade (K-8) and for grades nine through twelve collectively. The objectives remain the same at each grade level, while the complexity of the skills needed to meet them changes. For example, one of the five mathematics objectives is "the student can compute accurately." While first grade students might be required to add or subtract two whole numbers, students in grade eight might be expected to add, subtract, multiply and divide whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percents. Criterion-referenced tests will be developed based on these objectives.

Objectives to be measured on the eleventh grade test of "adult functional competency" have not yet been identified.

What tests are to be used?

The committee which initially compiled the kindergarten objectives reviewed a number of commercially available readiness tests. The test selected for entering first graders is the *Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery*, published by Teachers College Press of Columbia University in New York. The test was modified somewhat following the Spring 1979 field trial.

The activities or questions on the test are designed to assess the student's memory, vocabulary, number knowledge, coordination, ability to follow instructions, picture and story comprehension, ability to identify colors, shapes, parts of the body, etc. The 20-30 minute test is administered to each child individually by the classroom teacher.

Test items for grades one, two, three, six, and eight will be developed and field tested by Instructional Objectives Exchange (IOX). The criterion-referenced tests are to be based on the South Carolina basic skills objectives adopted by the Board of Education in July 1979.

The Department of Education has not yet determined how, or by whom, the eleventh grade test will be developed.

How are test results to be used?

The Basic Skills Act directs schools to use the readiness test results to help diagnose student deficiencies, and to provide appropriate developmental activities to the child while s/he is in the first grade. To assist teachers in planning, the Department of Education has published a collection of suggested developmental activities based on the 18 kindergarten objectives. The activities were written primarily by kindergarten and first grade teachers.

The Department has advised local school districts that the test should not be used:

(1) As the sole criterion for determining whether a student is ready or unready for first grade work;
(2) To provide readiness activities only to those children who score below 88; or
(3) To lock children into readiness programs for longer than is necessary.

The primary purposes of the basic skills tests to be administered in grades 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8, as specified by the legislation, are:

(1) To diagnose student deficiencies, and
(2) To determine instruction needed by the student to bring his/her performance up to the statewide minimum standard.

The adult functional competency test for grade eleven is to provide program assessment data. However, the basic skills legislation also states that the Board of Education shall use "baseline data" (i.e., test results from 1981-82 to 1988-89) to determine the high school credentials to be awarded students not meeting the minimum achievement scores.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The Basic Skills Act requires local school districts to "provide basic instruction to aid the student in bringing his/her performance up to the statewide minimum standards for a particular grade when a deficiency is indicated by the results of the tests administered under the basic skills assessment program or other assessment procedures."

The legislation also states that all costs relating to provisions of the Act are to be paid totally from state funds. Funds must be appropriated annually by the General Assembly, and there is as yet no clear indication of what remedial programs will cost, or how much money the legislature will allocate, if any.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

According to the Basic Skills Act, the Board of Education may develop separate standards and a separate program of testing to evaluate all handicapped students. Further, the Board may also "develop a special diploma to be awarded to pupils who are handicapped and who therefore should be evaluated against separate standards."

In its annual report to the legislature on the assessment program (1978-79), the Board recommended that the section of Act 631 concerning handicapped students be amended. The Board's recommendation is that all students be included in testing unless a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), required by P.L. 94-142, indicates that such assessment would be inappropriate. In preparing an IEP, schools would be directed to specifically address the appropriateness of the assessment program for the individual student.

The amendments recommended by the Board also include deleting reference to special diplomas for handicapped students based on separate standards.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The Basic Skills Act applies only to South Carolina's public schools.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

In March and April 1979 the *Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery* was administered to approximately 5,000 students in 75 schools in 33 school districts. Based on those test results, and utilizing teacher judgment, a score of 88 (of a possible 117 points) was adopted as the minimum indication of readiness for formal first grade work. On some test items, a student's score depends upon how complete the teacher considers the response to be. Thus it is possible that a student's score might vary somewhat, depending upon the test administrator's judgment.

Tables 1 and 2 show the number and percent of students judged to be "ready" and "not ready" for first grade work. A much higher percentage of white students was found to be ready than Black and American Indian children. More female students (64.3%) were found to be ready than male students (56.4%). The majority of handicapped students (53.8%) were judged "not ready," as were many of the children (49.2%) eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

S. CAROLINA: TABLE 1

Number and Percentage of Students in Each of the Classifications "Ready," "Not Ready," and "Incomplete Data," by Racial Ethnic Category and for the Total Group

Racial/Ethnic Category	Ready (Number) (Percent)	Not Ready (Number) (Percent)	Incomplete* Data (Number) (Percent)	Total (Number) (Percent)
American Indian	17	33	4	54
	31.5	61.1	7.4	0.1
Asian American	171	79	13	263
	65.0	30.0	5.0	0.5
Hispanic	63	30	5	98
	64.3	30.6	5.1	0.2
Black	9,398	9,997	1,652	21,047
	44.7	47.5	7.8	43.4
White	19,492	6,689	802	26,983
	72.2	24.8	3.0	55.6
Unknown	47	23	10	80
	58.8	28.7	12.5	0.2
Totals	29,188	16,851	2,486	48,525
	60.2	34.7	5.1	100.0

*NOTE: *Students were placed in the "Incomplete Data" category when two conditions occurred simultaneously: (1) Responses for one or more test items were not recorded on the answer form and (2) the score obtained from the available data was less than 88. If condition #1 occurred but the obtained score was 88 or more, the student was classified as "ready."*

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

Students will take the readiness test, criterion-referenced tests, and eleventh grade competency test only once.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

John Matthews, a school principal and member of the South Carolina General Assembly, was one of the Black legislators who opposed the competency testing bill as it was first introduced. The real problems, says Matthews, were the promotion and graduation provisions included in the bill. A primary concern about the current program is that no funds have been ap-

S. CAROLINA: TABLE 2

Number and Percentage of Students in Each of the Classifications "Ready," "Not Ready," and "Incomplete Data," by Sex, First Grade Repeater or Non-Repeater, Handicapped or Non-Handicapped, and Eligibility for Free/ Reduced-Price Lunch Program

Group	Ready (Number) (Percent)	Not Ready (Number) (Percent)	Incomplete Data (Number) (Percent)	Total* (Number) (Percent)
Female	14,876 64.3	7,168 31.0	1,098 4.7	23,142 47.7
Male	14,286 56.4	9,672 38.1	1,382 5.5	25,340 52.2
Repeaters	2,807 56.7	1,865 37.7	279 5.6	4,951 10.2
Non-Repeaters	26,279 60.5	14,956 34.4	2,195 5.1	43,430 89.8
Handicapped	614 37.7	876 53.8	139 8.5	1,629 3.4
Non-Handicapped	28,485 60.9	15,947 34.1	2,336 5.0	46,768 96.6
Not Eligible for Free/ Reduced Price Lunch	15,564 76.1	4,373 21.4	510 2.5	20,447 42.3
Eligible for Reduced Price Lunch	2,085 61.8	1,122 33.2	169 5.0	3,376 7.0
Eligible for Free Lunch	7,607 42.6	8,798 49.2	1,461 8.2	17,866 36.9

*NOTE: *Number and percentage for subgroups may differ from state totals due to incomplete data for some students, e.g., information on eligibility for free/reduced-price lunch program was not available for 6836 students.*

propriated for remedial programs. The legislature may consider appropriations for remediation which could concentrate on the primary grades one through three.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

During the 1979-80 school year, the first readiness tests were administered. Tests for grades 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8 must be developed, field tested and revised

by the Spring of 1981. In addition, instructional programs and materials must be developed for field testing over the next four years.

In its 1978-79 report on the assessment program, the Department of Education has proposed a number of amendments for the legislature to consider. The recommendations would:

(1) Establish minimum standards of student achievement in the grades in which basic skills tests are administered, rather than in all grades;
(2) Require development of basic skills tests in reading, writing, and mathematics at the end of grade eleven rather than a test of "adult functional competency." The Department has identified three problems in developing a test of functional competency: identifying skills necessary to function competently as an adult and translating them into test items; developing a test that has instructional validity; i.e., that measures skills reflected in the instruction provided to all students; and, potential labeling of students who do not pass the test as functionally incompetent;
(3) Delete the section of the act which directs the Board of Education to use the grade eleven baseline data to determine high school credentials to be awarded to students not meeting minimum standards; and,
(4) Amend the section concerning testing of handicapped students as discussed earlier.

These recommendations, as well as the level of funds to be appropriated for the assessment program, must be considered by the legislature in 1980.

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Tennessee

Does Tennessee have a minimum competency testing program?

A high school proficiency test will first be administered in Spring 1981 to eleventh graders and, beginning with that class, students must pass the test in order to receive a high school diploma. Two additional opportunities to retake the test will be given in the twelfth grade. Diagnostic tests are administered statewide to all eighth grade students, and local school systems are required to give diagnostic tests in grades four, five, or six.

Who authorized the program?

The State Board of Education established statewide minimum competency testing on November 10, 1977, although the Board was not alone in its interest in such a program. From 1975 to 1978, several bills were introduced in the Tennessee legislature concerning testing and basic skills improvement. Perhaps partly in response to the legislature's interest, in June 1976 the Board of Education appointed a Committee on High School Graduation Requirements. Competency testing as a basis for awarding high school diplomas was one of the major issues explored by the committee.

What are the main provisions of the authorization?

The following recommendations concerning testing were made by the Committee on High School Graduation Requirements. They were unanimously approved by the Board in November 1977.

(1) A proficiency test in the basic skills should be required as a prerequisite for receiving a high school diploma beginning with the class of 1982;
(2) The test should be administered at the end of the eleventh grade, with two additional opportunities for testing in the twelfth grade;
(3) Local school systems should be required to administer at least two preliminary diagnostic tests in the eighth grade and in either fourth, fifth, or sixth grade; and
(4) Skills in math, reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling should be tested.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

Following the State Board's decision to implement competency testing, an Implementation Committee for Preficiency Testing was appointed to plan the program. The committee, which has been dissolved, was composed of State Board members, State Department personnel, and educators from local districts. No citizens outside the education community served on the planning committee. The State Department of Education is responsible for test selection and administration of the eighth and eleventh grade proficiency tests.

What is the implementation timetable?

The first competency tests in Tennessee were administered to a small sample of twelfth grade students in May 1977.

The State Board resolution establishing minimum competency testing was passed in November 1977. The first diagnostic eighth grade tests were administered in March 1978, less than five months later. During that time, objectives had to be determined, a test selected, and plans made for administration.

Eighth grade diagnostic tests are administered annually in the spring. The tests for high school graduation will be first administered to eleventh graders in Spring 1981. Beginning in 1978-79, local districts are required to test students in either fourth, fifth, or sixth grade.

How do the tests relate to the state competency goals or objectives?

For the first diagnostic eighth grade test in 1978, objectives developed in Denver, Colorado for the *Proficiency and Review Test* were adopted. The objectives were distributed to the local districts at the end of March, and testing occurred in April and May. Questions were raised concerning the curricular validity of the test. The following year the Department of Education began

working to develop objectives specifically related to the Tennessee curriculum.

Groups of teachers were consulted and an initial list of 139 objectives in mathematics, language, spelling, and reading was developed. These objectives were then sent ot 1,400 teachers for review and rating. The survey resulted in a final list of 80 objectives to be covered by the eighth grade test: 30 in mathematics, 10 in spelling, 22 in language, and 18 in reading. The test developed for Spring 1979 covers 50 of the 80 objectives, but teachers were not told which 50 would be included.

What tests are to be used?

For the pilot testing in May 1977, the Proficiency and Review Test was purchased from the Denver public school system where it has been used since the early 1960s. The 200-item test covers objectives in math, reading, language, and spelling.

After statewide competency testing was mandated, the Implementation Committee began searching for a diagnostic test to use for the eighth grade. On February 10, 1978, the committee reported to the State Board that no suitable test had been found and recommended that the Department of Education have a test developed. The new test was to relate to the objectives identified in the Denver Proficiency and Review Test. The Committee also recommended that tests be administered in Spring 1978, thus giving the Department approximately two months to acquire the test and plan for its administration. For the tests administered in April 1978, items which matched the 50 Denver objectives were drawn from the Objective Item Based Reference Test (ORBIT) developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill. No field test was conducted.

No funds were allocated for the eighth grade testing program, which meant that money had to be redirected from the on-going statewide standardized testing program. Enough funds were available to purchase one test booklet for every four students, which resulted in a month-long testing period and a variety of scheduling and logistical problems.

In Spring 1979, a new test developed by Scholastic Testing Service based on objectives identified by educators in Tennessee was administered to all eighth graders. Similar to Denver's test, the new test contains 200 multiple choice items covering 50 objectives.

Thus far no eleventh grade test for graduation purposes has been developed, and a number of local school systems have raised questions about which educational objectives are to be used in developing the high school competency test — those used for the 1978 eighth grade test, or for the 1979 test. In July 1979, the State Board decided that the proficiency test taken by eleventh graders in 1981 should be based on the objectives covered by the eighth grade test in 1978. The proficiency test taken by juniors in 1982 will be based on the 1979 eighth grade test objectives.

How are test results to be used?

The stated purpose of the eighth grade testing is to identify students who lack the basic skills so that remediation can be provided. The competency test to be administered in the eleventh grade will be used to determine students' eligibility for high school graduation.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

Local districts are not required to develop remedial programs by the State Board's resolution. No state funds have been provided to assist local systems in developing programs, and there is no monitoring to assure that remedial help is provided for each student who fails.

Many local districts are developing remediation programs for students who fail the eighth grade test. In some districts, various categorical funds, including Title I, are being used to support the programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

For the first testing in Spring 1978, all students classified as eighth graders were required to be tested. At the request of the Board, procedures for administering the 1979 eighth grade test included policies concerning the participation of handicapped students. The policies provided the following:

(1) Local school systems, upon recommendation of the local multidisciplinary team, may exempt certain students, verified as handicapped and requiring special education, from taking the test. The Individual Education Program (IEP) is to be used as an indication of proficiency;
(2) Any eighth grade student, regardless of handicapping condition, may take the test if he or she wishes to do so;
(3) The test must be furnished in large print and Braille for visually handicapped students;
(4) An interpretor must be furnished for deaf and hard-of-hearing students;
(5) A local school system may remove the test results for handicapped students from published data that might be personally identifiable;
(6) Careful and detailed summaries must be kept so that data for future program policies concerning handicapped students will be more meaningful.

Results of the performance of handicapped students are not reported directly at the state level. However, summary data indicate that state average scores are about four percent lower when the results for exceptional students are included.

The Department of Education estimates that approximately 500 handicapped students were exempted from testing in 1979. Because the eighth grade test is only for diagnostic purposes, there is less concern over it than over the high school proficiency test. Some educators within the Department of Exceptional Children take the position that a handicapped student who successfully completes the program specified in his or her IEP should be

granted a diploma. Current State Board guidelines would, however, deny diplomas to all students, including the handicapped, who do not pass the competency test.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

In March 1979, the State Board ruled that in order for a private school to be approved by the Department of Education it must meet all requirements followed by the public schools, including those applying to diagnostic and proficiency testing. Beginning in 1979-80, private schools which are state approved must administer the eighth grade test and will also be required to administer the high school competency test beginning in Spring 1981.

There are approximately 434 private schools in Tennessee, of which only 143 are currently approved by the state. In the spring of 1979, only 23 of the state-approved private schools elected to take the eighth grade test.

Many private schools have expressed strong opposition to being required to participate in the state testing program, and have raised questions about the State Board's authority. Representatives of the private schools plan to submit the resolution to the Attorney General for interpretation, as at least a first step in opposing the tests.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

In April and May, 1978, 71,364 eighth graders were tested. More than half were found to need remedial help, using a cutoff score of 70 percent determined by the Department of Education. Table 1 illustrates the statewide results.

TENNESSEE: TABLE 1

Eighth Grade Test Results
Spring 1978

Percentage of Students Scoring Below 70%

Subject	% Scoring Below 70
Language	37
Mathematics	53
Spelling	54
Reading	58

A different test was administered to all eighth graders in Spring 1979, and students achieved considerably higher scores (Table 2). Reasons proposed for the improved performance focus primarily on changes in the test and administration procedures. Some of the possible reasons suggested by local educators are: Teachers were better prepared to administer the test; test administration conditions were improved, including a two-day testing period; teachers were involved in developing the objectives for the 1979 test; teachers were more aware of what was to be tested; and, the 1978 test had been more hastily implemented.

TENNESSEE: TABLE 2

Eighth Grade Test Results
Spring 1979

Percentage of Students Scoring Below 70%

Subject	% Scoring Below 70% (Excluding Handicapped students)
Language	36
Mathematics	38
Spelling	20
Reading	20

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

The eighth grade proficiency test is administered one time. Students will have two opportunities to take the eleventh grade graduation test.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

As in other states, some members of the Black community in Tennessee are particularly concerned about the test's impact on minority students. During the 1979 session of the General Assembly, Sen. Avon Williams introduced two bills concerning competency testing, both of which died in committee.

SB 352 would have prohibited testing "for the purpose of determining graduation qualifications for any grade or program from K through 12." The bill would also have prohibited issuance of attendance certificates rather than regular diplomas unless unique to particular schools or programs and not based on a statewide program.

A second bill, SB 1260, stated that performance on a proficiency test could not be used to determine a student's promotion or graduation unless and until the Department of Education implements and funds a system of prompt remedial instruction for students who do not perform satisfactorily.

The bills, which expected to be reintroduced in the 1980 session, had support from all of the General Assembly's Black legislators, but little support among its white members, according to the legislation's author.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

Educators acknowledge that the competency testing experiences — and lawsuits — in other states are being closely watched, and there is speculation that the program in Tennessee may be changed in the future. However, if the competency testing program continues as currently mandated, there are a number of unresolved issues and tasks to be addressed, including: The development of a high school competency test and determination of passing standards; funding and implementation of remedial programs; testing for handicapped students; the involvement of private schools; and the possible inclusion of additional subject areas.

In July 1979, the State Board directed the Department of Education to establish objectives in social studies, health and safety, and science. The Board will seek funds for pilot testing in Spring 1981.

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July 20, 1977
November 10, 1977
February 10, 1978
March 23, 1978
May 23, 1978
July 31, 1978
August 11, 1978
November 10, 1978
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The following issues of *Tennessee Education* published by the State Department of Education:

Vol. 4, No. 12, June, 1977
Vol. 5, No. 2, August, 1977
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Texas

Does Texas have a minimum competency testing program?

In 1978, the Texas Education Agency tested a representative sample of sixth and eleventh graders to determine how well students were achieving in the basic skills. The Texas Assessment Project has been referred to by an Education Agency official as "group competency testing."

A new statewide minimum competency testing program began in 1979-80 for all students in grades five and nine. It will be expanded in 1980-81 to include third graders. Passage of a competency test is not a requirement for graduation.

Who authorized the program?

The Texas Assessment Project was initiated by the State Board of Education and supported by a three million dollar appropriation by the legislature in 1977.

In Spring 1979, the legislature mandated statewide "minimum basic skills competency testing." The mandate appeared in a Senate finance bill (SB 350) under the heading "Support for Educationally Disadvantaged Students."

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

SB 350 requires the following with respect to competency testing:

(1) Beginning in 1979-80, criterion-referenced tests in reading, writing, and mathematics are to be administered to all fifth grade students;
(2) "Secondary exit level" tests in language arts and mathematics are to be administered to ninth graders. Although the bill states that the competencies to be assessed should be "appropriate for a high school graduate," there is no stated requirement that students must pass the test in order to graduate;
(3) Ninth grade students who fail to demonstrate mastery of minimum competencies are to be given the opportunity to retake the test each year it is administered.
(4) Beginning in 1980-81, criterion-referenced tests in the basic skills are to be administered to all third graders.

The legislation also specified that meetings or portions of meetings held by the Texas Education Agency and/or local districts at which individual assessment instruments or items are discussed or adopted are not open to the public.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

The state education agency's Division of Education Assessment had the major responsibliity for administering the Texas Assessment in 1978 and 1979, and is also responsible for planning and implementing the "minimum basic skills competency testing" mandated by the legislature.

What is the implementation timetable?

Statewide minimum competency tests will be administered for the first time in February and March 1980 for students in grades five and nine. In 1980-81 the testing program will be expanded to include the third grade.

How do the tests relate to state competency goals or objectives?

In 1977 a series of regional meetings were held at which local educators were involved in identifying math and reading objectives. Four lists of basic objectives were generated. "Midpoint level student outcomes" for reading and mathematics are competencies expected to be attained by students in grade six. "Exit level student outcomes" in reading and mathematics are competencies which students are expected to have attained by grade 11.

In mathematics, 12 mid-point objectives and 11 exit level objectives were selected for measurement purposes. In reading, 11 objectives were selected for mid-point testing at grade six, and 10 objectives were selected for the eleventh grade test.

Math and reading tests were then developed to match these objectives.

Although the tests were based on objectives identified as essential by some educators, the objectives had not necessarily been uniformly taught in all districts.

Objectives to be measured by the statewide competency testing in Spring 1980 were identified by a committee of local educators and State Agency staff. Objectives were distributed to local districts in Fall 1979. Tests were developed to match the specified objectives.

What tests are to be used?

For the Texas Assessment Project, the State Board directed the State Education Agency to develop critierion-referenced math and reading tests. Tests for sixth and eleventh graders were developed with the assistance of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the Educational Testing Service. Four items were developed to measure each objective. Items developed by NAEP were used to measure writing and citizenship skills.

Reading, mathematics, and writing tests to be used in the statewide competency testing program were developed by Educational Testing Service.

Items were pilot tested in October 1979, and reviewed by the committee which developed the set of test objectives.

How are test results to be used?

The purpose of the Texas Assessment Project was to identify areas in which instructional programs needed to be strengthened statewide. No information was reported on the performance of individual school districts, schools, teachers, or students.

SB 350 specifies that student performance data from the competency testing program are to be used "to design and implement appropriate compensatory instructional services for students in the district's schools . . ." Each district must submit an annual report to the commissioner of education describing how state compensatory funds have been used to provide for those services.

Passage of the ninth grade test is not a requirement for graduation, although the test is to measure competencies "deemed appropriate for a high school graduate." The legislation suggests that minimum standards are to be set for at least the ninth grade test. It states that ninth grade students who fail to demonstrate mastery of minimum exit level competencies shall be given the opportunity to retake the test each time it is administered.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The 1979 legislation mandating minimum competency testing requires each school district to design and implement "appropriate compensatory instructional services" for students identified as needing remediation. No funds were allocated for actually administering the program. SB 350 did increase the state compensatory education funds for each educationally disadvantaged pupil from $27.00 to $44.00 per year, provided the total amount allocated statewide does not exceed $42.9 million. The number of

educationally disadvantaged students in each district is to be determined by averaging the best six months enrollment in the free and reduced lunch program for the 1978-79 school year.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

SB 350 states that any student who has a physical or mental impairment or a learning disability that prevents him/her from mastering the competencies which the assessment instruments are designed to measure may be exempted. How that ruling is to be interpreted to insure fairness for all handicapped students, and who is to determine which students should be tested, must yet be decided.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

The statewide competency testing applies only to the state's public schools, as was true of the Texas Assessment Project.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

For the 1978 Assessment Project approximately 10,000 sixth graders and 8,000 eleventh graders were tested. Mastery levels for groups, rather than individuals, were designated. Three performance levels were established to indicate how well students, on the whole, performed on each objective:

Level I — Statewide student achievement was considered adequate when an objective was mastered by at least 90 percent of all students. An objective was considered mastered by a student correctly answering three out of four questions.

Level II — Mastery of an objective by 75 to 89 percent of students was considered less than adequate, but did not necessarily represent a high priority for remedial attention.

Level III — Student performance was considered critically deficient on objectives mastered by fewer than 75 percent of students tested.

The results of the math and reading tests are reported in terms of the percentage of students mastering each objective. The most pronounced differences in performance were found among students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Tables 1 and 2 show the number of objectives mastered at the three levels for Black, Mexican-American, and white students. For example, on the sixth grade math test there were 12 objectives. A performance Level III on an objective indicated that it was mastered by less than 75 percent of the students. Among the white students, a Level III was obtained on three of the twelve objectives. Mexican-American students obtained Level III on seven of the objectives. Black students performed at Level III on 10 of the 12 objectives.

Other patterns found in the test results showed that students in suburban districts performed better than urban students. Positive relationships were found between family income and test performance and between parent's education level and test results. Students from homes where only English was

TEXAS: TABLE 1

Texas Assessment Project
1978
Grade 6

No. of Objectives Mastered by Students at Level I, Level II, and Level III

	Math			Reading		
	Black	Mex-Amer	White	Black	Mex-Amer	White
Level I	0	0	2	1	1	7
Level II	2	5	7	4	6	2
Level III	10	7	3	6	4	2

TEXAS: TABLE 2

Texas Assessment Project
1978
Grade 11

No. of Objectives Mastered by Students at Level I, Level II, and Level III

	Math			Reading		
	Black	Mex-Amer	White	Black	Mex-Amer	White
Level I	1	2	5	0	1	6
Level II	3	3	3	3	5	4
Level III	7	6	3	7	4	0

spoken performed better than students from homes where another language predominates. The performance of students in Title I and state compensatory programs was below that of non-participants, and the lowest performance was found among students identified as language or learning disabled — the only special education students for whom results are reported.

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

The ninth grade competency test will be readministered to students who do not initially demonstrate mastery. SB 350 specifies that students who fail may retake the test each time it is administered.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

While there is presently no statewide test used for high school graduation, there are a number of competency testing programs being developed and implemented by local districts. Programs are being developed in a number of urban districts where the potential impact on minority students is great.

A primary concern about the state competency testing program is that passage of the ninth grade test may in the future be required for graduation. The test is referred to in the legislation as being at a "secondary exit level" and ninth graders who do not meet a minimum standard are to be retested until the standard is achieved.

What are the next steps in implementing the competency program?

A number of questions and issues concerning implementation of the statewide competency testing program are raised by the legislation: What policies will govern testing of handicapped students? What funds are to be used for test development and administration? How are the minimum competencies to be identified? How are minimum performance standards to be determined? What provisions will be made for encouraging citizen participation in the program's development, particularly given that Education Agency and local district meetings at which assessment instruments are discussed are not open to the public? To what extent does a district's enrollment in the free and reduced-price lunch program, on which compensatory funds are based, accurately reflect the number of students requiring remedial services? What type of remedial instruction will be provided to students who do not meet the minimum standards? And finally, what conclusions about programs and student placement may be made drawn from test results?

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Mathematics — Texas Assessment of Essential Objectives

Writing — A Statewide Assessment in Texas

Citizenship — A Statewide Assessment in Texas

Summary Report — Texas Assessment Project

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Virginia

Does Virginia have a minimum competency testing program?

After January 1, 1981, students who graduate from high school in Virginia must have passed a minimum competency test in order to receive a regular diploma. Also, a Basic Skills Learning Program, which involves annual criterion-referenced testing, has been developed for students in grades one through six.

Who mandated the program?

The testing programs were authorized by the Standards of Quality Act for the Public Schools in Virginia passed by the General Assembly in March 1978. There were, however, earlier steps which led to the development of the current basic skills and competency testing programs:

(1) The 1976 Standards of Quality Act directed local divisions to emphasize development of basic skills (reading, communications and mathematics) particularly in grades one through six. It also directed the Department of Education to develop statewide minimum objectives in the basic skills and tests to measure progress in these objectives;
(2) In 1976 the State Board initiated a competency assessment program for high school graduation. Students were to demonstrate competence in

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four areas — communication skills (reading, writing, and speaking), computation skills, history and culture of the United States and its economic system, and the ability to pursue higher education or find employment. Specific competencies within these four areas were to be developed and assessed by local districts;

(3) In 1977 the State Board of Education adopted statewide educational objectives and approved the procedures for developing criterion referenced testing in the basic skills for grades one through six. Testing was to begin in 1978-79.

However, some superintendents opposed local competency testing. The Virginia Association of School Administrators called for a statewide program, as was subsequently mandated by the 1978 legislature.

What are the main provisions of the mandate?

The 1978 Standards of Quality Act mandated a basic skills testing program with criterion referenced tests to be administered annually to all students in grades one through six.

In terms of high school competency testing, the legislation specifies that students graduating after January 1, 1981 must pass tests prescribed by the State Board. In July 1978 the Board adopted revised "Standards for Accrediting Schools in Virginia" which specify that:

(1) The State Board would prescribe competency tests in math and reading; and,

(2) Local divisions would be responsible for assessing students' knowledge of history and government and the knowledge and skills needed to qualify for further education and employment.

Who is responsible for planning and administering the program?

The Department of Education, sometimes using its staff, sometimes using advisory committees, has been responsible for defining objectives, selecting tests, coordinating test administration, and recommending a passing standard. The program is administered primarily through the Division of Research, Evaluation, and Testing. Final policy decisions are made by the State Board.

What is the implementation timetable?

The time line to be followed in implementing the Basic Skills program was specified in the legislation as follows:

	Grades Tested	Subjects Tested
1978-79	1, 2, 3	math and reading
1979-80	1, 2, 3, 4	math and reading
1980-81	1 through 6	math, reading, and communications

The legislation mandating statewide competency testing was passed in March 1978. The first class to be affected by its requirements will graduate in 1981. Tests were initially administered to tenth graders in October 1978. The schedule allowed approximately six months for objectives to be determined, tests selected, and a passing standard established.

There were, however, nine divisions which had already developed local minimum competency programs, and in those divisions students in tenth grade were not required to take the state test.

Competency tests were again administered in Spring 1979 to ninth grade students and to many of the tenth graders who had failed or who did not take the tests in the fall. The nine divisions which had not participated in the fall were included in the spring testing.

In June 1979 the State Board called for a one-year moratorium on testing in 1979-80 in order to review the competencies which students are expected to master and to evaluate the competency testing program. Tenth and eleventh grade students who previously failed the competency test were retested as planned, but no new ninth grade students were tested.

How do the tests relate to state competency goals or objectives?

Minimum educational objectives for grades one through six were developed by the Division of Elementary Education and approved by the State Board in May 1977. Reading, math, and communications committees composed of teachers, principals, and supervisors assisted in identifying the objectives. Two drafts of the objectives were sent to all local school divisions for review.

There are fourteen broad objectives in reading, five in communications, and fourteen in math which students are expected to master by the end of sixth grade. In addition, specific objectives have been defined for each grade level. The basic skills tests are based upon the identified minimum objectives.

The minimum competency reading test measures objectives in five areas: understanding safety warnings, completing forms and applications, using reference sources. determining main ideas, and using documents. The State had previously identified two broad student competencies in reading: (1) The student will locate specific information contained in printed material, and (2) the student will read and demonstrate an understanding of written materials. The Department of Education, in adopting a commercial reading test, essentially adopted the test's five main objectives as Virginia's educational objectives in reading.

The mathematics test was developed to measure 15 objectives originally identified by the Virginia Beach school division. Included are computation with whole numbers, decimals, fractions and percentages; using charts, maps and tables; basic geometric concepts; measurement; and practical personal finance. The objectives upon which the math and reading tests were based were adopted by the State Board in June 1978. The objectives were not necessarily uniformly taught prior to the first testing.

What tests are to be used?

For the basic skills tests, items which match minimum statewide educational objectives are supplied by a contractor according to specifications prepared by the Department. The Department is responsible for technical aspects of test development. Two forms of the test have been developed: Form A is composed of items covering all of the objectives in a subject area, with either three or four items per objective; Form B consists of a collection of one-page, six-item, mini tests, each of which is devoted to a single objective within a subject area.

The reading test selected for the minimum competency program is the Instructional Objectives Exchange (IOX) Basic Skills Test of Reading. The mathematics test is one which was developed originally in a shorter version by Scholastic Testing Service for the Virginia Beach school division.

The reading test consists of 60 items, while the math test has 99 items. Both tests emphasize "functional" skills, that is, math and reading skills applied in practical, everyday situations. There are, however, basic academic skills on both tests.

In the fall of 1978, the *Richmond News Leader* sued the state under the Freedom of Information Act, seeking the right to publish the competency tests once administered. The newspaper won the suit and has printed the full text of the math tests administered in 1978-79. However, the Instructional Objectives Exchange has refused to release the reading test to the newspaper. Thus, alternate forms of at least the math test must be developed for each administration.

In addition to administering state-prescribed tests, local districts are responsible for assessing students' competencies in citizenship and their abilities to qualify for further education or employment. How divisions are defining and assessing these comptencies is not currently being monitored at the state level.

How are test results to be used?

The minimum competency tests are used to determine a student's eligibility for high school graduation and to identify students needing remedial instruction.

The Standards of Quality Act states that the basic skills tests are primarily to provide the classroom teacher with information to help assess the educational needs of individual students. The Department of Education's testing service has advised local divisions that the appropriate use of test results is to identify a student's skill deficiences. Nevertheless, some divisions are beginning to reassess their promotion and retention policies, and some are using basic skills test results in determining whether students should be promoted. This practice is locally determined and is not monitored at the state level in any formal way.

Are remedial programs required? Are they funded?

The Standards of Quality Act of 1978 specifies that remedial instruction is to be provided for students in grades one through six who do not achieve the

minimum educational objectives. No funds, however, were allocated for remedial programs.

Remediation for students failing the competency test is not specifically required by the legislation. Local divisions are encouraged by the Department of Education to develop remedial programs. A Department official estimates that approximately one-half of the high schools in the state have thus far developed remedial programs. In some divisions, remediation is provided by the regular classroom teachers. In others, special remedial resource rooms have been established. No state funds have been allocated for remediation, and there is no systematic monitoring of local divisions' remedial programs.

Are handicapped students to be tested?

Local divisions determine whether exceptional students participate in the basic skills testing program in grades one through six. In general, the teacher who has the primary responsibility for the child's instructional program administers the level of the test which s/he considers appropriate for the individual student.

Guidelines concerning the participation of handicapped students in the competency testing program were developed by the State Superintendent's office prior to the Fall 1978 testing. They specify that students whose Individual Education Plans (IEP) indicate a program leading to a diploma are to be tested. However, there is no uniform state policy determining which handicapped students are eligible to receive high school diplomas. The guidelines were interpreted in different ways, and in a number of divisions no handicapped students were tested. Clarified guidelines are now being developed for future testing.

Modifications which could be used in testing students with various handicapping conditions were distributed to local divisions along with the general guidelines. No modifications specifically applicable to educable mentally handicapped students were suggested. Adaptations for students with other handicapped conditions are less than comprehensive. For example, the only suggestion made for testing learning disabled students is "allow student to wear noise buffer if needed."

The Department of Special Education originally submitted five modifications approriate for learning disabled students. Of these, four were deleted from the instructions sent to school systems. A five-member task force within special education is now attempting to develop a more comprehensive list of test adaptations.

No appropriate test modifications were available for some handicapped students in the Fall 1978 testing. The parents of at least one student have questioned the fariness and legality of denying a student a diploma when the technology does not exist to test his or her level of competence.

The performance of handicapped students in the Fall 1978 testing is shown in Table 1. In general, exceptional students, regardless of the nature of the handicapping condition, failed the competency tests at higher rates than non-handicapped students. The Department of Education has cautioned that the

results are not completely accurate because of mistaken classification of some students and computer errors.

VIRGINIA: TABLE 1

Virginia Competency Test Results
Fall 1978

Percentage of Handicapped Students Failing Reading and Math

	N Tested	% Failing Reading	% Failing Math
Educable mentally handicapped	635	93	93
Multiply handicapped	18	74	50
Physically handicapped	26	23	39
Visually impaired	12	31	33
Hearing impaired	27	33	30
Learning disabled	581	47	40
Emotionally disturbed	78	42	44

Approximately 1,000 handicapped tenth grade students were tested in Spring 1979. Of those, 27.2 percent passed the reading test, and 27.5 percent passed the mathematics test.

Testing students for whom English is a second language is also an important issue in a number of divisions. In Arlington, for example, the percentage of students whose native language is other than English has risen from seven to 19 percent since 1974.

Guidelines for testing in Fall 1978 stated that "no special provisions have been made for students for whom English is a second language. They must take the regular tests under normal administrative procedures." Policies adopted by local systems varied (e.g., in one division, students who had received less than two years of English instruction were exempted from testing). Policies concerning testing of non-English speaking students who enter Virginia schools in their last years of high school have not been established.

Are tests to be administered in the private schools?

Private schools which have state accreditation must administer the competency tests. The schedule for administration may be determined by each school. Private schools which do administer the tests must pay for the test booklets and scoring services.

How have students performed on the competency tests?

On Form A of the basic skills tests, students achieve mastery of an objective by correctly answering three of three or three of four questions. On Form B, which has six items per objective, a student must correctly answer five of the six to demonstrate mastery. These standards, as was the passing standard for the competency test, were determined by the Department of Education and approved by the Board.

Currently, local divisions are not required to report results of the basic skills tests administered in grades one through six. Some reporting of group data may be required in the future.

Initially, the passing standard for the competency test was to be determined following the Fall 1978 testing. However, the State Board wished to avoid charges that the standard was set to keep the number of failures politically or economically acceptable, and in September the Board attempted to develop a cutoff score at its monthly meeting. The Department requested additional time to work on establishing a cutoff point. The Board delayed the decision for a month, during which time the tests were reviewed by seven committees of 15 persons each. In October, the Department recommended that 70 percent of total number of items correct be adopted as the passing standard. The Department's recommendation was adopted by the State Board.

The results of the Fall 1978 competency testing reflect the following patterns: Minority students performed more poorly than white students; students from the most affluent divisions generally had the highest performance; students for whom English is a second language failed at significantly higher rates than other students, and the highest failure rates were found among the handicapped, particularly educable mentally handicapped students. The results of the Fall 1978 testing are shown in Table 2.

VIRGINIA: TABLE 2

Virginia Competency Test Results
Fall 1978

Percentage of Students Failing Reading and Math

	N Tested	% Failing Reading	% Failing Math
All students	71,149	14.5	13.7
Black students	15,569	32.8	34.4
White students	53,904	9.0	7.8
"Other" students	991	20.1	9.7

Competency tests were again administered in the Spring 1979. The test results for non-handicapped ninth graders are shown in Table 3. Overall, the performance of students in all sub-groups improved over that of tenth graders tested in the fall. However, the disparity between the performance of white and minority students remains large.

VIRGINIA: TABLE 3

Virginia Competency Test Results
Spring 1979

Percentage of Ninth Grade Students Failing Reading and Math

	N Tested	% Failing Reading	% Failing Math
All students	78,962	11.3	10.5
Black students	18,140	26.0	25.1
White students	59,455	6.7	6.0
"Other" students	1,180	13.3	7.0

The results for non-handicapped tenth graders tested in Spring 1979 are shown in Table 4. The results include students who previously failed one or both tests as well as students who were absent or not enrolled when the tests were given in the fall.

TABLE 4

Virginia Competency Test Results
Spring 1979

Percentage of Tenth Graders Failing Reading and Math

	N Tested	% Failing Reading	% Failing Math
All students	9,095	31.5	33.1
Black students	3,779	45.8	47.5
White students	5,019	20.7	22.1
"Other" students	244	29.5	23.8

Will students have more than one opportunity to take the tests?

Students who will graduate in 1981 took the competency test for the first time as ninth graders in Fall 1978. They were to have three additional opportunities to retake the test in the spring of 1979, 1980, and 1981. However, when tests were readministered in Spring 1979, some divisions, which either had not developed remedial programs or felt that more time was needed for remediation, did not retest all students who had failed the previous fall. Students who were not retested in the spring will not have a second opportunity to take the tests until the end of their junior year. They will have a total of three chances to pass the test. Students graduating in 1982 should have four opportunities to take the test before they are to graduate. How the year's moratorium on testing will affect students graduating in subsequent years has not yet been determined.

What concerns have been raised about the competency testing program?

The NAACP has questioned a number of aspects of the competency testing program in Virginia, according to Executive Director Jack Gravely. Among these are lack of funds for remediation, potential cultural bias in the test, the possibility that teachers will teach to the test, and the failure of some white educators to really make the effort to teach Black students.

Gravely also expressed concern about test administration procedures in a few districts. In one district, for example, some students who had failed the competency test were given a two-hour gym class when the test was readministered. The NAACP has officially taken the position that the competency test should not be used to deny students a high school diploma.

What are the next steps in implementing the program?

During the 1979-80 school year, competency tests will be administered only to students who have previously failed. The Department of Education and State Board will be reviewing the competencies which students should be expected to meet, and also evaluating other aspects of the competency testing program.

In August 1979, a new State Superintendent took office. He has indicated that he would like to see a competency-type testing program begun at an earlier grade. The new superintendent's position and the year's delay in testing make it seem likely that Virginia's competency testing program may undergo changes in the coming year.

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Summary Results A — Description of Population Tested.

Summary Results B — Percentage Passing Reading and Percentage Passing Mathematics.

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Virginia Graduation Test Results — Spring 1979.

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Glossary

*Terms used in connection with minimum competency programs vary from state to state. The following definitions are intended only as a guideline to provide some clues to readers of this report.**

Accreditation—The process of approval of school programs and facilities by some public or private agency on a mandatory or voluntary basis. Programs and facilities are generally measured against a set of established minimum standards.

Accountability—The process in which an individual, group, or institution is held responsible for pupil achievement, usually measured by means of a test.

Achievement test—A test that attempts to measure the amount learned by a student, usually in academic subject matter or basic skills. Such tests can be either *norm-referenced* or *criterion-referenced.*

*Drawn in part from *Minimal Competency Testing* by Peter W. Airasian, George F. Madaus and Joseph J. Pedulla, published and copyrighted by Educational Technology Publications. Used with permission of the publisher. Several testing definitions used with permission from *Interpreting Test Results* by the South Carolina School Advisory Council Assistance Project.

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Aptitude test—Attempts to measure what a child *might* be capable of learning. It differs in purpose from an achievement test. An aptitude test attempts to predict future learning or performance; an achievement test looks at past learning.

Basic Skills—Traditional school-taught skills in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, e.g., add, subtract, multiply, and divide, punctuate and capitalize correctly, etc.

Compensatory program--Generally, a program provided for children identified as disadvantaged in some way and in need of special or extra attention and instruction.

Competencies—Statements which identify specific skills, processes, and learnings students are expected to accomplish in school.

Competency-based graduation—A program in which the award of a high school diploma is made contingent upon successful accomplishment of specific, prespecified behaviors.

Criterion-referenced test—A test on which an individual pupil's performance is interpreted in terms of his or her performance on a set of prespecified objectives or competencies.

Cultural bias—Refers (in testing) to test items or content that one cultural or ethnic group will be more likely to respond to in the desired manner than a different group.

Curriculum validity—A measure of the extent to which the test items represent the curriculum to which the test-takers have been exposed.

Cut-off score—That score which serves to differentiate individuals who "pass" and "fail" a test; if the cut-off score is 70, pupils who attain scores below 70 "fail" the test.

Demographic variable—Any characteristic relating to the dynamic balance of a human population; e.g., economic status, racial or ethnic composition, population density, etc.

Differentiated diploma—Diploma that bears some indication of the holder's success in meeting proscribed performance standards established by the giver of the diploma.

Domain—A distinctly defined sphere of knowledge.

Educable Mentally Handicapped/Retarded (EMH/EMR)—A term used by many school systems to designate a particular group of children with mental handicaps. A typical definition is found in the South Carolina Code of Laws: "(EMH) means pupils of legal school age whose intellectual limitations require special classes or special instruction to make them economically useful and socially adjusted." See also *Trainable Mentally Handicapped*.

Exit examination—Generally, a pencil and paper test that students must take in order to receive a high school diploma or credentials.

Field test—A data-gathering technique in which a test or evaluation instrument is administered to a sample population to determine such things as the test's reliability and validity.

Functional literacy—A term used in some competency testing programs to indicate the level of competency at which an individual can use basic skills to perform the day-to-day tasks required for independent living.

Grade equivalent score—The grade of pupils for which a given score is the average. If the pupil's score on a test is equal to the average score attained by pupils in the sixth month of grade four, his or her grade equivalent score is 4.6.

Individual Education Program (IEP)—A written statement, required by the Education Of All Handicapped Children Act, which describes a handicapped child's present performance level, annual instructional goals, and specific services to be provided.

Instructional Objectives—*See* competencies.

Life skills—Pupil performances which involve the application of school-learned basic skills to real-life situations, *e.g.*, balance a checkbook, write a business letter, complete a job application, etc.

Mastery—Possession of a skill or understanding of a specific bit of knowledge.

Mean score—Determined by adding together a list of scores and dividing the sum by the number of scores; typically referred to as the "average score."

Minimum competency testing—A program in which students are tested to determine their mastery of certain skills defined as essential aspects of school learning or essential for performing tasks routinely confronted in adult life.

Norm-referenced test—A test on which an individual pupil's performance is interpreted in terms of his or her standing relative to the performance of other pupils who took the test.

Percentile score—A method of reporting test results where the score of an individual is expressed as the percent of the total test group he scored as good or better than. If Jane scored at the "60th percentile," her test results were as good or better than 60 percent of the total group taking the test.

Performance standards—*See* standards.

Proficiency testing—*See* minimum competency testing.

Readiness test—A test given to a group of students in an attempt to determine their readiness for certain instruction. In South Carolina, administered to entering first graders.

Remediation—The process in which pupils identified as not having learned certain competencies to a satisfactory level are provided additional instruction or resources to remedy their learning gaps.

School skills—*See* basic skills.

Standard setting—The process by which the standard or cut-off score for a minimal competency test is established; standard setting is essentially a judgmental process.

Standardized test—A test designed to be administered and scored under uniform conditions, used to obtain comparable measures in different classes or schools and usually interpreted in terms of predetermined norms.

Standards—Levels of performance; in minimal competency graduation programs, the standard is the lowest score which a student may attain and still be granted a high school diploma; *see* cut-off score.

Statewide assessment—A testing program carried out to examine the general level of achievement of pupils in schools throughout the state.

Survival skills—*See* life skills.

Test—A sample of behavior used to make inferences about a pupil's performance on a larger domain of similar behaviors.

Termination credentials—Refers to the credentials given to a student upon completion of a high school program. *See* differentiated diploma.

Trainable Mentally Handicapped/Retarded (TMH/TMR)—A term used by many school systems to designate a group of children with mental handicaps severe enough to preclude any significant academic instruction, but who may, according to South Carolina's definition, "profit by a special type of training to the extent that they may become more nearly self-sufficient and less burdensome to others."

Validity—The extent to which a test measures what it is intended to measure; in line with the different purposes of tests, there are different types of validity.

Appendix

A Citizen's Introduction to Minimal Competency Testing*

M. Hayes Mizell

1. **What are "minimal competency programs"?**
"Minimal competency programs" are

- organized efforts
- to make sure public school students
- are able to demonstrate their mastery
- of certain *minimum* skills
- needed to perform tasks
- they will routinely confront in adult life.

2. **What are the components of minimal competency programs?**
There are many different types of such programs. Though they differ from

*From *A Citizen's Guide to Minimum Competency Testing Programs for Students*, 3rd Edition, March, 1979. Published by the Southeastern Public Education Program, 401 Columbia Building, Columbia, S. C. 29201. (In this book, the terms "minimum" and "minimal" competency are used interchangeably.)

state to state or from one school district to another, here are some of the features often found in these programs:

- Statements of the specific skills—such as those needed for reading, writing, and performing mathematical computations—that students are required to master. These are called "performance standards" or "learning objectives." They help pinpoint the competencies schools are responsible for teaching *all* children.
- Tests to determine if students have mastered the required skills; or tests to diagnose the specific skills in which the students may be weak. The term "minimal competency testing" if often used.
- Requirements that students cannot advance to the the next grade, cannot graduate from school, or cannot receive a regular diploma if they cannot demonstrate their mastery of the required minimal skills.
- Requirements that students must take a special remedial course if they cannot demonstrate their mastery of the skills.

3. **Why am I reading and hearing so much about the need for minimal competency programs in public schools?**

Pressures to find ways to assure that high school graduates have mastered certain basic, minimum skills come from several quarters:

- Many *parents* are disturbed when they find their children cannot read, write, or compute at a level the parents think is necessary.
- Many *educators* are concerned because high school students' scores on standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, are declining.
- Many *college instructors* are upset when they find some students can't write a coherent paragraph.
- Many *employers* are angry when young job applicants can't fill out an application, follow simple written directions, or can't read well enough to perform even simple job tasks.

These collective experiences have created a concern that too many students graduating from public schools do not have or cannot apply the basic skills needed to function effectively in our society.

4. **What is meant by "some high school students do not have or cannot apply the skills needed to function in society"?**

There are certain tasks that are fundamental to functioning as an adult member of society. These can include:

- being responsible for routine, personal, homemaking, and business affairs;
- communicating with others;
- pursuing secondary education (formal or self-directed);
- getting and holding a job; and
- fulfilling the duties of responsible citizenship.

In order to perform these tasks, specific skills are necessary. An adult must be able to read well enough to scan the "want-ads" in a newspaper and follow instructions to get and hold a job. He or she must be able to write well enough to fill out a job application, or write a letter.

And he or she must be able to do mathematics well enough to pay bills, to know how much money has been spent or is on hand, and to perform simple household calculations. *Reading, writing, and calculating well enough to perform these basic tasks is what is meant by having minimal competencies.* Using these skills in daily adult life is what is meant by applying the skills in order to function in society.

5. **Who decides what skills and tasks are minimally necessary?**

In states and local school districts which have adopted minimal competency programs, these decisions have been made by either a state legislature, a state board of education, a division of a state department of education, or by a local school board. Because each of these groups is a public body accountable in some way to citizens, there is an opportunity for citizens to have a voice in determining the content of minimal competency programs.

6. **If there are students who have not mastered or who cannot apply basic skills, what can be done?**

There are many options, not all of which are desirable. Schools have responded and are responding to this problem in a variety of ways. They might:

- encourage or allow students who have not mastered or who cannot apply basic skills to drop out of school;
- not allow students to graduate until they can demonstrate their mastery and use of basic skills;
- not allow students to receive a regular high school diploma;
- not allow students to be promoted from one grade level to the next;
- do nothing; allow students to be promoted or graduated without having mastered basic skills or without having demonstrated they can apply them; or
- assign such students to a less demanding curriculum or "track."

Each of the above responses penalizes the students involved, but does not assure the students will ultimately master basic skills as a result of the penalty.

Other schools might choose to:

- identify students' weaknesses in specific basic skill areas early in the students' school career, and continuously throughout, and provide them with special assistance to develop the required skills;
- provide students with individualized instruction utilizing one or more of the following: teachers' aides, programmed instruction, peer instruction, significantly smaller classes, special materials, skill labs, etc.;
- require such students to attend summer school;
- establish tutoring programs to provide such students with special help after school;
- work with parents to teach them how to help their children learn basic skills at home; or

- assign such students to special classes which devote more time and effort to emphasizing the mastery and use of basic skills in working with the regular course content.

The above efforts may or may not cause students to be able to master and apply basic skills, but at least the focus is on providing help to the students.

Minimal competency programs sometimes involve one or more of the responses listed in both of the above groups.

7. What do people hope minimal competency programs will achieve?

There are several attitudes and motives held by those supporting minimal competency programs. These include the following:

Minimal competency programs will help those children who have the greatest educational needs. It is argued that the educational needs of many underachieving students have often been ignored or inappropriately met by school systems. Minimal competency programs are seen as a way to require school systems to identify who these students are and to focus more attention, energy, and resources on properly responding to their basic educational needs. Many parents of minority and disadvantaged students hold this view because they feel the schools have not given their children enough attention and have allowed them to "slide by" without mastering essential basic skills.

Minimal competency programs will motivate students and stop "social promotions." Some people believe too many students put forth too little effort in school because they know they will be promoted or graduated regardless of how well they perform. When this happens, it is called "social promotion." As a result, some students do not acquire the basic skills they need. It is hoped that if all students are required to demonstrate their mastery of certain minimal competencies before they can be promoted or graduated, this will put an end to "social promotion." It is also hoped these requirements will motivate students to work harder to learn the skills necessary to pass competency tests.

Minimal competency programs will define more precisely what skills must be taught and learned. Holding school systems accountable has been difficult because it often has not been clear specifically what teachers are expected to teach or what students are expected to learn. Minimal competency programs can establish certain learning objectives at the state level or require local school districts to develop them for specific subject areas. Students will then know what they must learn. Parents will have benchmarks against which to measure their children's progress. And teachers can focus more attention on teaching those specific skills.

Minimal competency programs will certify that students have specific minimal competencies. Employers used to rely on high school diplomas to certify that students could read, write, and compute at acceptable levels of competence. Now, however, many employers have complained that even high school graduates do not always have basic competencies necessary in business and industry. Minimal competency programs tied to graduation

requirements may restore confidence that a diploma means competency in certain areas. Where not tied to graduation requirements, minimal competency programs may at least aid employers who want to identify those students who do and do not have certain minimal skills.

8. **What are the arguments against minimal competency programs?**

There are many concerns about minimal competency programs. Among those heard most frequently are the following:

Minimal competency programs will exclude more children from schools and further stigmatize and harm underachieving youth. Minimal competency programs can be punitive and exclusionary if they are used simply to deny students promotion or graduation. There is a concern that students who perform poorly on the competency tests will not receive the kind of help they need, and they will be branded as failures and drop out of school. This is especially worrisome for students who do not perform well on paper-and-pencil tests, which is the format of most minimal competency tests. Another concern is that minimal competency programs will be used to certify a student's *lack* of prescribed competencies, which may result in many academically marginal youth becoming unemployable. Children who have historically been shortchanged by the schools-minorities, the low-income, and the disadvantaged—are particularly vulnerable to these abuses.

Minimal competency programs will not assure that children will receive effective remediation. Identifying students' academic problems is only the first step in providing them the help they need. Money, training, and personnel are then necessary to provide students with special help to strengthen their skills. There is no guarantee adequate resources will be provided for such efforts through minimal competency programs. Even if such resources are available, educators have had great difficulty in establishing effective remedial programs. Few effective remedial programs have been developed and maintained by most school systems.

Minimal competency programs oversimplify the competency issue. Questions have been raised about the wisdom of placing so much emphasis on the "basics" when there are so many other factors essential to a successful adjustment to adult life and work. The eduational process is exceedingly complex, and it is naive to believe that "essential" competencies can be isolated and tested.

Minimal competency programs will result in curricula becoming too narrow. Similarly, there is concern that so much emphasis on basic skills will narrow school curricula. This means less attention will be devoted to providing a broad range of important educational experiences for young people. Youngsters who perform poorly in academic subjects, but who may excel in other subject areas in which they are more talented, may suffer the most.

Minimal competency programs will place the burden for "failure" on students. Under the provisions of many minimal competency programs, it is the students who must bear the heaviest burden for their unsatisfactory performance on a competency test. This is seen as another example of

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"blaming the victim" because even though it may be schools which have failed to meet the students' basic skill needs, it is students who are denied promotion or graduation, or who are unfairly labeled. Legislators, school board members, administrators, or teachers are not subject to comparable penalities for their failure to create necessary programs, provide quality instruction, or appropriate the money that will help students learn the basic skills. Thus, if students do not master the competencies expected of them, they are the ones who receive the blame and punishment, while others who may be at least partially responsible for poor student performance are not held accountable.

Minimal competency programs will cause educators to be held unfairly accountable. Another perspective is that of school officials and classroom teachers who believe they may be evaluated and held accountable on the basis of how their students perform on a minimal competency test. A test score alone, however, would not take into account other factors affecting students' competencies. Such factors may include the curriculum, school resources, the students' family background and home environment, etc. Classroom teachers point out that they have no control over these factors.

Minimal competency programs will encourage teachers to "teach the test." Teachers may be under so much pressure to have their students score well on minimal competency tests that they may spend most of their time teaching the students the very limited and specific skills needed to do well on the tests. The effect of this may be that students can successfully complete competency tests but still may not be able to apply those skills to other situations, or learn the range of skills they need.

Minimal competency programs will cause the "minimum" to become the "maximum." The use of minimal competency programs may result in a curriculum which will no longer challenge students who are capable of exceeding the "minimum." There are concerns that schools are already doing too little to challenge such students. The initiation of minimal competency programs may signal to average and above average students that the schools have lowered their expectations of them. As a result, these students may no longer work as hard because they will know they can "get by" so long as they demonstrate their mastery of the minimal competencies required. This may cause the additional problem that students who can meet these minimal requirements may want to graduate from school early because, they may argue, they have met the basic requirements set by the schools. Thus, the question of how high or low to set the "minimum" is an important issue.

9. **What do minimal competency tests try to measure?**

Minimal competency tests can measure "school skills' and/or how school skills are applied to real-life situations ("life tasks"):

"School skills." In these tests, students are asked to respond to test items which call for a straightforward use of skills learned in school. They probably do not test the student's ability to apply the skills learned in school to a life

situation. Thus, a test for "school skills" may determine that a student knows how to add and subtract, but that does not necessarily mean the student can balance a checkbook. These test items may not be too different from those found on typical school achievement tests except that they are designed only to test the student's *minimum* competencies: or

"Life tasks" (or, *"life skills"*). In these tests, the students are asked to respond to questions which simulate situations they may encounter in adult life. For example, they may be asked to complete a part of an application for a job or to check the addition on a grocery bill.

10. **Do minimal competency tests measure anything other than students' competencies in reading, writing, and math?**

It depends on what your state legislature, your state board of education, or your local school board determines are the important competencies students should have. Citizens' opinions of what are the essential competencies may differ from those of the representative bodies listed above.

Most people agree it is important for students to be competent in: reading, writing, and mathematics/computation.

However, in some places people believe it is also important for students to be able to demonstrate their competencies in: Health, Citizenship, Personal and Family Finances, Civic and Social Responsibility, Listening, Oral Expression, Family Life, Analyzing, Environmental Protection, Energy Conservation, and Human Relations.

11. **When would students be tested in a minimal competency program?**

It differs from place to place, and this is another area where citizen input is valuable in shaping the program.

Currently, in some school districts, the students must take and pass a test in the twelfth grade in order to qualify for graduation or a regular diploma. Testing so late in the students' school career gives additional information to students, parents, and employers about students' actual performance levels. However, it doesn't allow for any remedial work to help the students make up their learning gaps, or help the school change its curriculum or the teaching styles of its teachers.

Minimal competency programs are more likely to be helpful to students in those districts where tests are administered periodically during the students' school career. In some states, students are tested in grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 11. Other states test less frequently, such as in grades 4 and 8.

12. **Can you give examples of what might be included on a minimal competency test?**

Yes. Some tasks ask for a direct application of "school skills." The

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following are sample questions from the "Proficiency and Review" test in Denver, Colorado:

1. Add the following sets of numbers:

   978
   669
   435
   +587

   The correct answer is:

   (A) 2568 (b)2569 (C)2659

   (D)2669 (E)NONE

2. If you think a word is misspelled, circle the letter before it. If you think all the words are spelled correctly, circle the letter before NONE:

   (A) touch (B) message C) choclate

   (D) yourself (E) NONE

3. This question measures ability to recognize correct English. There are three types of errors: punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Each line in the following passage is numbered and represents one test question. Mark each line according to the following key: P for an error in punctuation, C for an error in capitalization, G for an error in grammar, and N for no error.

   (A) Have you ever went to a flea

   (B) market. Sandmore High School will have the

   (C) second International Flea Market on Saturday.

13. Are all competency tests like that?

No. Other tests ask students to apply school skills to real-life tasks, such as these sample questions from a test developed by the Educational Testing Service:

1. A job pays $6.50 per hour with time-and-a-half for overtime. If you work 40 regular hours and eight overtime hours at that job, how much would you earn?

   (A) $369 (B) $312 (C)$338 (D)$468

2. An advertisement:

   Pine Grove Camp Needs Counselors
   Please apply in writing to:
   Morgan Davis
   10 Lincoln Road
   Louisville, Kentucky 40202

   Directions: Thomas Moore is 17. He lives at 69 Banberry Lane in Louisville, Kentucky 40202. He has worked as a counselor at Camp Pioneer for two years. He has been trained in first-aid and water safety.

   Pretend that you are Thomas Moore and write a letter applying for the job of counselor at Pine Grove Camp.

3. A warning on a medicine label may read:

> Severe sore throat or sore throat accompanied by fever, headache, nausea, or vomiting may be serious. Consult a physician immediately. If rash or irritation develops, stop using and consult a physician. Do not use more than five days or give to chidren under three years of age unless directed by a physician.

According to the label, if you have a sore throat, fever, and a headache, you should:

(A) use the medicine for five days.
(B) call a doctor as soon as you can.
(C) increase the amount of medicine you take.
(D) use other medication to cure the fever and headache.

14. Aren't most schools giving minimal competency tests now?

Not exactly. At present, most tests given in schools are either developed (1) by individual classroom teachers, or (2) by national test publishers.

The tests developed by individual classroom teachers usually test only those skills or facts which the teacher thinks the students should be able to demonstrate based on what the teacher has taught in his or her classroom. These are called "criterion-referenced" tests. One problem in using them as minimal competency tests is that they vary widely from one classroom to another. One sixth grade teacher of math may expect more of his or her students, and design a test accordingly, than another math teacher in the same school teaching students of the same grade level. Not only do the "minimums" which are tested vary from one teacher to another, but the quality of the tests differ as well.

Tests developed by national publishers (such as the popular achievement tests, for example, the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills) are designed to test many different levels of students' performance, not just minimum. But, more importantly, they are what are known as "norm-referenced" tests, and only tell how well a student performed compared to other students. They give no useful information on whether a student can perform a particular skill. If the students on whom the test was "normed" all had low skill levels in reading, for example, it would be possible for a student to have a relatively high score and still not read well enough to function in adult life.

15. If a student passes the minimal competency test required for graduation from high school, does this mean the student is able to perform at the twelfth grade level?

No. Most minimal competency requirements for graduation are designed only to assure that the student can successfully complete the specific items included on the test. These represent the *minimal* level of performance acceptable, not what high school graduates should have learned in other areas or even what the average twelfth grader knows. Most of the people who

construct these tests believe that the items represent skills necessary for adult literacy. (This usually corresponds to what students are expected to know when they are in the seventh or eighth grade.)

Note that because the tests measure *minimal* levels of skills, they don't tell you how well some students can do, nor the range of skills from "minimally acceptable" to "best." Students who have passed them and have received a regular high school diploma will perform at many different levels. One student may be able to perform at a level expected of an eighth grader, while another may be able to function at a level expected of a junior in college.

16. **What happens if a student doesn't "pass" the competency test?**

Again, this depends on the provisions of a particular state or school district. Citizen input is critical in determining this aspect of minimal competency programs.

In some places, if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the competency test, he or she simply doesn't receive a regular diploma. (He or she may receive a special certificate of attendance.)

In other places, the student may receive remedial help, or may have to take a special course. Many minimal competency programs allow the student to take the test again after receiving remedial help.

Some state minimal competency laws address this problem. Colorado law requires schools to provide extra tutorial assistance to students. California law requires students to be provided with remedial assistance and for parent-teacher-principal-student conferences to be held to discuss the problem.

17. **How effective are remedial programs?**

The problem with such programs is that many school districts lack well-developed remedial programs in the basic skills—especially at the secondary school level.

It is one thing to require that students who fail the competency test receive remedial help, but it is quite another matter to develop an *effective* remedial program. The problem is underscored when one considers that many of the students who are most likely to fail a minimal competency test are those who have been receiving some form of remedial help anyway. The challenge clearly will be how to use the information the tests will provide in a constructive manner, and how to improve and support the special programs some students will need.

18. **If minimal competency programs require that local school districts provide special programs for those who do not pass the tests, who will pay for such programs?**

This is unclear. The state legislature would have to provide funds for such programs or local school districts would have to find or raise money to finance them. In the past, local school districts have complained when state legislatures passed laws requiring the districts to initiate new educational programs but provided no new state monies to help pay for those programs.

The lack of money could become an excuse for inaction on the part of the districts. Of course, the intended benefits of any minimal competency program would be seriously undermined if there were a requirement that students not passing the test should receive remedial help only to find districts were giving "lip service" to this requirement in the absence of any state funds to finance such programs.

However, there are those who feel that few additional resources are necessary and that schools could accomplish a great deal by simply redirecting monies that are now used in ineffective attempts to teach students. Such instructional strategies as "peer teaching" (more skilled students helping teach less skilled students on an individual basis) might be used in the absence of more money

19. **Can you explain more about how minimal competency programs are related to concerns about "social promotion"?**

Many citizens percieve "social promotion" as a cause of public school graduates not having skills the public thinks are essential. "Social promotion" refers to the practice of allowing students to advance to the next grade even if they have not mastered the academic skills taught in the lower grade. The promotion, in other words, tends to be based more on the student's age than on what he or she has demonstrated he or she has learned.

In the past, this practice has been defended on the basis that it was not realistic to retain students in the same grade year after year. Such retentions often resulted in over-age students being in the same classroom with much younger children. It has been the opinion of many educators that such retained students do not have the opportunity for healthy social and emotional development, and that they suffer from the stigma of having to remain back a grade while their classmates go on to the next grade. The effect of such a stigma has been that often these students are branded as failures, develop a poor self-concept, and drop out of school.

During the 1975-76 school year in one Southern state, half of the students who dropped out of school had also repeated one or more grades. Thus, many educators contend that "retaining" a student does not solve the student's motivational or learning problems.

20. **Well, is "social promotion" good or bad?**

Think of it in terms of what the child really needs. "Social promotion" is not good if it becomes a cop-out for the school with the result that the child's real academic and emotional needs are ignored. Obviously, it does the child no good if he or she is passed along through the school system without ever having his or her real needs diagnosed and met, and that has too often been the case.

On the other hand, there is certainly no guarantee that the child's needs *will* be met just because he or she is "retained" at a particular grade level. If the school and its personnel have no commitment, plan, or resources for

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dealing with the child the second year he or she is in a grade that significantly differs from the way he or she was dealt with the first year he or she was in that same grade, then holding the child back will not likely help.

Meeting children's needs is not so simple as either promoting them or failing them. "Retaining" a student is usually meant to frighten, punish, or motivate the child, but it does not necessarily require the school or its personnel to do anything different to asure that the child will get the help he or she needs. Thus, the real emphasis should be on creating and supporting a system which requires schools more intensively to diagnose and address the needs of children who do not meet the minimal competency requirements.

If the children are really to be helped and to be able to perform minimal competencies, then the schools must have the commitment and capacity to give special attention to those children, regardless of whether they are promoted or "retained." Many children are not now receiving such attention. Of course, providing special attention requires strong and dedicated school administrators, good teachers, and money. A minimal competency program may help to better focus the resources which are presently available, but it is no substitute for more committed and skilled educators or for the money which is needed to train and employ such professionals.

21. **Are there other reasons people are now so interested in minimal competency programs?**

Yes. Some believe the value of a high school diploma has been "cheapened" because even students with a diploma cannot necessarily read, write, or compute well enough to succeed in a job. It is the opinion of many such people that only students who have clearly demonstrated their mastery of basic skills should receive a high school diploma. Other students who have attended public school for 12 years but have not mastered the basic skills should receive some kind of certificate of attendance, it is argued.

22. **Are the concerns about the value of a high school diploma valid?**

It depends on what is considered to be the purpose of a high school diploma. Some people, especially employers of high school graduates, want the diploma to be a convenient screening device or a guarantee which assures them the job applicant has certain basic skills. In other words, they want the diploma to be a *certificate* which, in effect, says the job applicant can perform certain basic skills. But, in reality, a diploma is a piece of paper which reveals very little about an individual's competency.

Some educators contend that it is wrong to think of the diploma as a document which certifies that the bearer has certain competencies. They say the diploma is really nothing more than an award for the student completing the course requirements the state has mandated. If you want to know whether a person is competent, these educators say, and what competencies the individual has, then it is necessary to examine the transcript of that person, as well as look at his or her record of performance in extra-curricular activities and talk with some of the educators who have taught and worked with that person.

Most of us would like to think there is a simple way of sorting out the potentially good workers from the bad ones, and the most competent from the least competent, but it is probably too much to expect that a high school diploma alone can provide the convenient means for making such determinations.

As members of the general public, we all know doctors, lawyers, teachers, barbers, and scholars who have diplomas hanging on their walls, but we have all had experiences which would cause us to doubt that these diplomas mean all such individuals are competent.

23. **What effect will minimal competency programs have on a school's curriculum?**

It seems logical that if students are to be tested to determine their mastery of certain skills, then the curricula of individual schools will have to reflect the new emphasis on those skills. Adjustments in what is taught, how it is taught, and the amount of time teaching it may be necessary. This will particularly be the case in those schools where significant numbers of students do not meet the minimal competency requirements. However, if a school implements the competency program in a way that places the burden of failure and the need for remediation only on the shoulders of those students who perform poorly, then few changes in the curriculum may occur.